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JUNE 2015

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The Dragon is a single-figure golfer who is fiercely competitive.





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FROM THE EDITOR

Do your bit to grow the game in May

Introduce someone else to the joys of the sport during National Golf Month

We love golf. Given you're reading Britain's best-selling golf magazine, let's assume you love golf, too. Now we can get thousands more people loving the game through National Golf Month in May.

We are proud to again be supporting this fantastic idea, which is now in its second year. The aims of NGM are simple – to remove the barriers to participation, bring back lapsed golfers, engage more female golfers and welcome families to their local clubs.

How will it do that? Throughout May golf clubs and professionals across the UK will be hosting special National Golf Month open days, free taster sessions, coaching activities for families, ladies and men, as well as individual lessons.

Many famous faces are backing the campaign, notably Ryder Cup captain Paul McGinley, European ladies No.1 Charley Hull and BBC Breakfast presenter Naga Munchetty.

McGinley told us: "Golf faces many challenges in these times as competition with other sport and social activities intensifies.

"Golf is a game that has given me and my family great pleasure, health benefits and opportunities to meet amazing people.

"I would encourage everybody to get behind this project as we endeavour to see more people enjoy the great benefits and fun that this game has to offer."

To get involved – and to get your friends, family and colleagues out on the fairway – ask your club pro, visit www.nationalgolfmonth.com, follow @Nat_Golf_Month and like 'nationalgolfmonth' on Facebook.

You can also join pros and personalities taking on the 30ft Putt Challenge, in which you can set up a hole – at home, at the club, in the office – and try to drain a 30-footer. See page 18 for more details.



Chris Jones, Editor
Today's Golfer
@thetodaysgolfer

NATIONAL GOLF MONTH
GET GOLFING MAY 2015
#GETGOLFING @Nat_Golf_Month

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First Tee

THE MOST IMPORTANT
THINGS IN GOLF

EDITED BY ROB MCGARR



A range with a view

It's built overlooking the Millennium Dome and Canary Wharf

The scenery at most driving ranges doesn't tend to excite, but the Greenwich Peninsula Driving Range is a different story. Hit a hook and your ball will be heading towards Canary Wharf; hit a slice and the O2 will be in danger.

The two-tier, 60-bay covered range will open in June, right outside North Greenwich Underground Station. With 120,000 people

using the station each day and eight million visitors to the O2 every year, the new facility could introduce golf to huge numbers.

"This is the biggest thing to happen in golf in London for 30 years," says Declan Malone, PGA pro and Founder of golf academy N1 Golf. "We feel passionate about promoting grass roots golf in the more deprived London Boroughs. We will be sending our PGA

Professionals in to schools and youth centres coupled with tuition sessions over at the Greenwich Peninsula Range. We will have a fully serviced N1 Academy at the range with eight PGA Professionals available."

Worry not: the range will be 350 yards long, so only the biggest hitters will have any chance of launching balls into the city.



Dome alone

This is the view golfers will get when they tee up here.



THE BIG DEBATE

Time to rip up handicaps?

Golf's player rating is much maligned...and could change soon

Walk into any clubhouse in Britain and the chances are you will hear a conversation about handicaps. Someone's is too high. Someone else's is too low. And don't even get us started on that guy. He is a bandit. But 19th hole gripes aside, does the current handicap system work or could it be improved?

How do you get a handicap?

"Our official system is run by The Council of National Golf Unions (CONGU)," explains Gemma Hunter, Handicap and Course Rating Executive for England Golf. "Members of affiliated golf clubs can gain a CONGU handicap by returning either three 18-hole or six nine-hole cards that have been signed by someone the club deems to be appropriate, which usually means another member."

Is three rounds enough of a test?

Arguably not. One TG reader told us he had a handicap of 18 when he joined a new club. Three qualifying rounds later the club's computer gave him a handicap of 24. "I felt like my old handicap was more accurate as it had been calculated over a greater number of rounds played over the course of four years," he says. "My club handicap has come down to 18, but it has taken just over a year." "In a perfect situation you need seven or more rounds to assess whether someone has the right handicap," admits Hunter.

Does it take too long for handicaps to change?

"Exceptional score reductions allow us to keep on top of people who are improving quickly," believes Hunter. "This system issues an additional reduction to anyone who completes two rounds that are four or more shots below their handicap in quick succession." "We don't get too many repeat

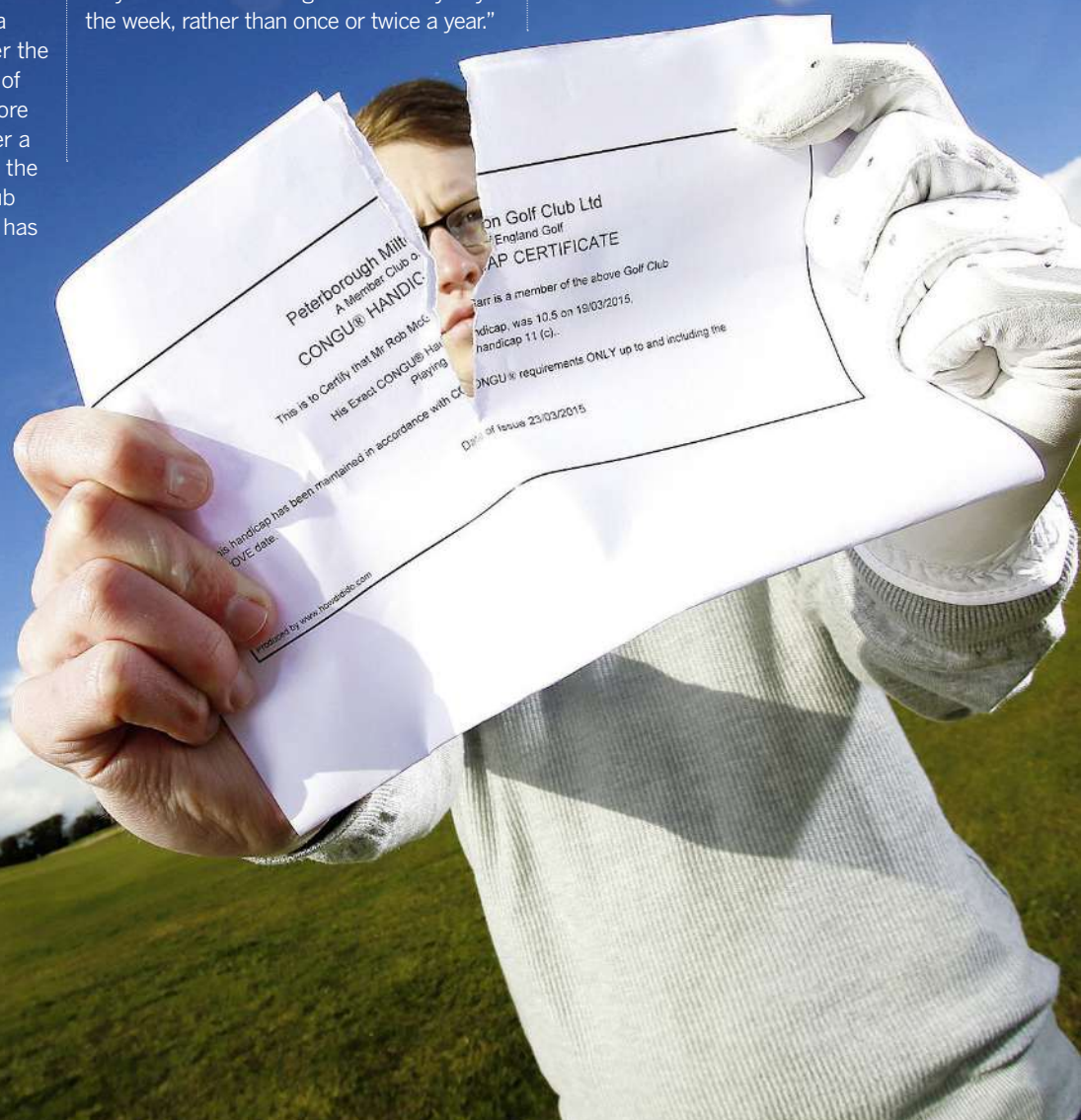
winners, so I think the reduction process works well," adds Jim Cunning, Secretary of Clevedon Golf Club. "I do, however, hear a lot of complaints about the fact that people in handicap categories four (21-28) and three (13-20) get cut 0.4 or 0.3 for every stroke they are under their handicap, but only go up 0.1 every time they go over their handicap. Members think this is unfair, as they believe older players' skill levels deteriorate faster than their handicaps rise."

How often should you play to your handicap?

"Your handicap is based on the score you can achieve if you play to your optimum level," reveals Hunter. "So a scratch handicapper will shoot two-over far more often than they will shoot level par and a 21-handicapper's average round will be more like 25 or 26-over." "Our members can't get their heads round this," says Cunning. "If their handicap is 21, they think they should be shooting 21-over every day of the week, rather than once or twice a year."

The new way of handicapping

American golf links its handicaps to a "slope rating" that assesses the difficulty of each course for players who have handicaps greater than scratch. Once this rating has been calculated, every visiting golfer is handicapped off it. So a 12-handicapper might receive 15 shots on a very difficult course but only six on an easy one. "I've played abroad and think this system is fairer," says Cunning. "The slope system is very detailed," agrees Hunter. "It takes everything from the depth of the rough to the placement of the bunkers into consideration." So why don't we use it? Funny you should say that. "We are now using the US system to rate courses and there are discussions about moving to a worldwide handicap system," reveals Hunter. "It is a big change, but I think something global will be in place within the next 10 years."



Adapting for Augusta National

How pros set up their bags according to the course

Augusta National has seven right-to-left dog-legs with only three – 1, 11 and 18 – bending the other way. Fairways are mown tightly and from green to tee, meaning you play against the grain; aprons are also

shorn, and the greens rock hard and lethally fast. So how did the players prepare for the challenge? Here are three crucial equipment changes many of the field would have made to gain the edge at the year's first Major.



Wedge loft and grind

"In the past - before the 2010 groove rule change - players would gravitate to more loft to increase stopping power on Augusta's greens," says Vokey tour representative Aaron Dill. "We'd usually make around five or more 62/64° wedges for players to use just for the week. However, now those higher-lofted wedges are harder to control and less likely to spin when you're in the rough, we've actually found that players are creating more spin with the less-lofted wedges - 54/56/58° - because the contact with the ball is more direct. As a result of that, the players won't change their wedge set-up as much as they used to."



Long irons out

"Hybrids and fairway metals are designed to fly higher and drop more steeply than long irons," says Chris Tuten, Titleist's director of tour promotions. "So our players will tend to replace their 2 or 3-irons with 915 H and HD hybrids or 915 fairway metals. Bill Haas replaced his 714 CB 2-iron with a 915 F18 fairway. It gives similar distance, but greater stopping power on reachable par 5s."



Driver draw bias

"Traditionally the Masters requires high draws off the tee," says Daryl Evans, European Tour manager at TaylorMade, "so you may see guys add a touch of loft and make small adjustments to their driver to promote a right-left ball flight. We may also see some guys set their driver up again a bit more upright to promote a draw."



MASTERS SPECIAL EDITIONS

This year's Masters showcased the growing trend for limited-edition equipment, typically released to coincide with the four Majors. This year we saw Hunter Mahan in a special version of FootJoy's HyperFlex shoe, while some TaylorMade staff were decked out in various Azalea-themed adidas kit, which you can now buy...



FootJoy HyperFlex

There are different Masters-inspired colours for the left and right shoe for the first time. For the player looking down there will be little difference, but the colour contrasts will be obvious to the consumer. **£150**



adidas polo shirts

Features the Azalea theme on the sleeves, placket, colour and left chest. Just 500 shirts released globally. Part of a special limited edition range which includes socks, a cap and a T-shirt. **£9.99-£39.99**



adidas Adipower Boost

The shoe is the same as the regular Adipower Boost, and retails at the same price, but features different styling with the Azalea-themed pattern around the heel and a coordinating pinkish sole. **£129.99**

Q&A

Rickie Fowler

Last year's nearly man is back with more power and more maturity

He was one of the revelations of 2014, a stand-out at the Ryder Cup and a new poster boy for American golf. With top-five finishes in each of last year's Majors (fifth at Augusta, second in the US Open and the Open, third at the US PGA, leading total scoring at 32-under), Rickie Fowler has proved he's got substance to go with the style. Now all he needs to do is win one...

Q Are you delighted with the majors in 2014 – or a bit gutted?

It's tough looking back, because I really wanted to get a win last year. But in terms of my goals for the year, I took care of everything apart from that. I made the Ryder Cup team, played through the FedEx Cup play-offs and was in contention in all four Major championships.

Q Did being in contention in those four Majors make you a better player?

Things happen, but when you start worrying and showing fear, you're going to go downhill. Looking back to where I was as an amateur and the progress I've made, I still kind of feel like a kid, but as far as my golf goes, I've definitely matured – and most of that happened in the last year.

Q What's the aim for 2015?

A win is definitely in order. The only tournament where I've been in a great position was the PGA Championship. I really felt like I had it and that was the one that really hurt the most.

Q How do you rate your Masters chances?

Last year at Augusta was always going to be an outside shot. I still wasn't 100% comfortable being

in contention for a Major. I did a lot of things well last year and feeling as comfortable as I did at the PGA Championship, carrying that forward to the Masters will be the biggest key. I felt very different from Augusta to the PGA last year and I know I can play Augusta as I've put up good numbers there before. I've putted well there, now I just have to go out and do it.

'Rory is definitely a step ahead of me – or four Majors ahead!'

Q Much has been made of a Rickie v Rory rivalry... is he the man to beat?

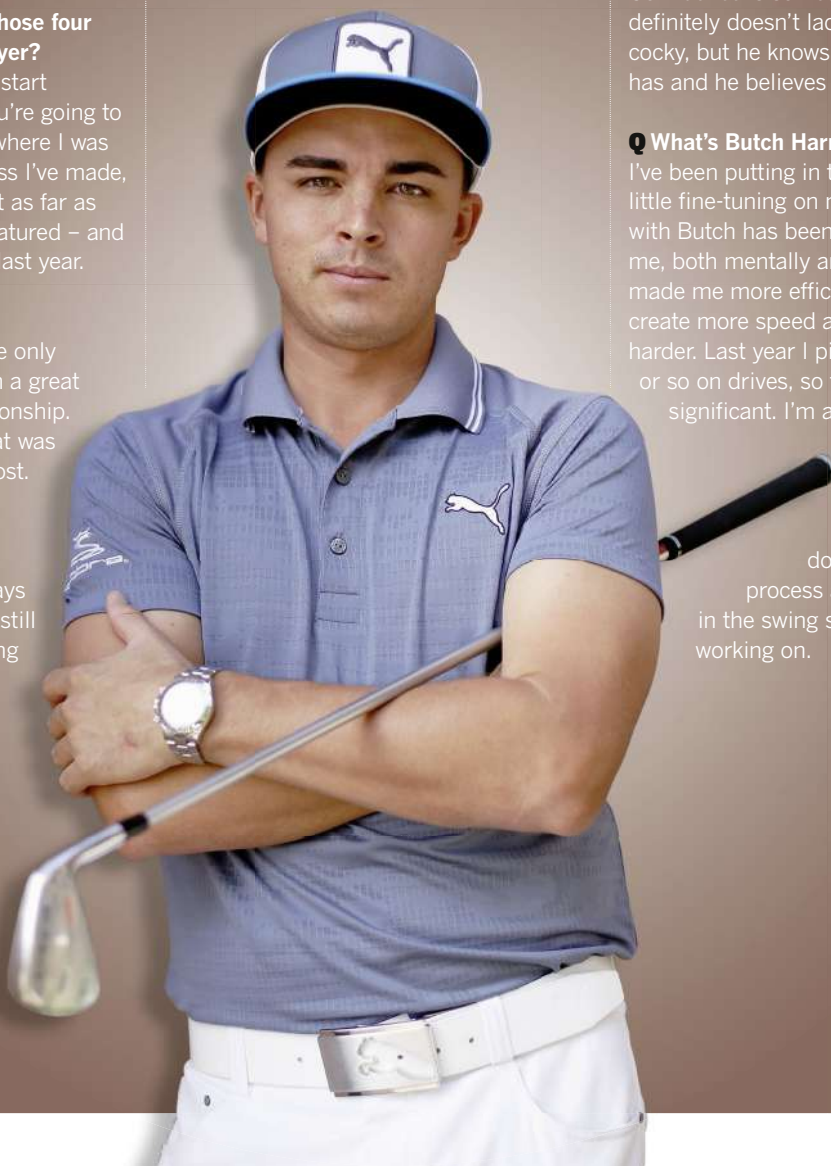
Rory is definitely a step ahead of me – or four Majors ahead! At times, when he is on top of his driving game, that is when he is very tough to beat. When he does that, it frees up the rest of his game to go and play some fairly effortless golf. When he's on, at present it's something that I can't match up with, as far as distance goes. I don't feel like my game is any weaker than his, but I'm definitely going to have to go out and show him that I'm around. He's not going to back up. If someone is going to beat him, they are going to have to earn it.

Q Are you in a better state to compete this year?

I've learnt that you can't be afraid. Confidence is something that Rory definitely doesn't lack. It's not that he's cocky, but he knows the game that he has and he believes in it, as he should.

Q What's Butch Harmon like to work with?

I've been putting in the hours, doing a little fine-tuning on my game. Working with Butch has been a big influence for me, both mentally and physically. He's made me more efficient, allowing me to create more speed and hit the ball a bit harder. Last year I picked up seven yards or so on drives, so that's pretty significant. I'm a lot more prepared to go tee it up on a Thursday than I've ever been, which is partly down to my mental process and actually believing in the swing stuff we've been working on.



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PLAYERS PREVIEW

The world's scariest hole

The stats and stories behind the 17th at Sawgrass, golf's most famous par 3

When the world's best players contest The Players Championship next month, all eyes will be on one hole. The par-3 17th shouldn't cause the best players in the world too many nightmares. It's a short shot to a large green, and a wedge is usually sufficient. But it's not that simple. "It is like having a 3 o'clock appointment for a root canal," says Mark Calcavecchia. "You're thinking about it all morning and you feel bad all day. You kind of know sooner or later you've got to get to it." But John Mahaffey perhaps sums up the all-or-nothing hole best: "The easiest par 5 on the course."

THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND THE VERY, VERY WET

150,000 Balls dunked per year.

4 Times a year a team of divers enter the lake to retrieve lost balls, taking two days each time.

11 Cameras on the hole during the tournament, including one

tucked under the lip of the bunker.

28 Balls found the water during 2014 Championship – the fewest since records began.

137 Length in yards on the scorecard, though it often plays closer to 120.

42 Consecutive rounds without putting one in the water, a record held by Stuart Appleby.

66 Worst ever score in competition, by grocery shop owner Angelo Spagnola.

12 Worst score by a pro, Bob Tway in

the third round 2005. He put four balls in the water, then three-putted. He was 7-under standing on the tee!

2.5 Best scoring average, held by Johnson Wagner.

6 Total aces, but none since 2002.

Ripple effect

The water is unlikely to look this calm during the tournament.

FANTASY GOLF: A LOOK AHEAD TO THIS MONTH'S EVENTS...

1 RBC HERITAGE APRIL 16 (TEAM DEADLINE 12:20PM)

At just over 7,100 yards, the windy and densely-bunkered Harbour Town requires precision over power to find its tight fairways and small greens. Kuchar, McDowell and Furyk have triumphed in recent years, while Luke Donald has five top-three finishes since 2009.

2 ZURICH CLASSIC APRIL 23 (TEAM DEADLINE 1PM)

TPC Louisiana boasts hazards aplenty in the form of swamps, more than 100 bunkers, and treacherously fast greens. The event has given seven of the last 10 winners their maiden Tour victory, including Seung-Yul Noh and Billy Horschel in the last two years.

3 PLAYERS CHAMPIONSHIP MAY 7 (TEAM DEADLINE 12:15PM)

TPC Sawgrass hosts the "fifth Major". Experience counts for much on a course with subtle contours, small greens and dog-legs, while the water-strewn closing pair represents one of the toughest finishes around (see above).

OUR PICK... MATT KUCHAR

Unlikely to appear at the Zurich Classic but will feature at Harbour Town and Sawgrass, where strategy and experience are key.

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CHARITY CHALLENGE

Can you hole a 30-footer?

Hole a monster putt and take on your mates

The National Golf Month 30ft Putt Challenge is challenging YOU to hole a 30-foot putt to raise awareness of golf and money for Dementia UK.

All you need to do is record yourself attempting to hole your putt and upload the video to Facebook.com/NationalGolfMonth and Twitter, mentioning @Nat_Golf_Month with the hashtag #GetGolfing. Then share it with your friends and challenge them to make their own putt.

You can do it on the golf course, or anywhere else that takes your fancy. Why not simply pop a paper cup on the office floor and challenge your colleagues to drain one? You can make a hole in a piece of paper and try it in

the park, the shopping centre, down three flights of stairs – the more imaginative your putt the better. All you need is a golf ball and putter. Or a broom, saucepan, hockey stick – whatever you can lay your hands on.

You can do it anywhere, with anything, whether you're an accomplished golfer or someone who's never held a club before. You'll be going up against not only your friends and colleagues, but also the likes of victorious 2014 Ryder Cup captain Paul McGinley and golf-obsessed actress Denise van Outen.

When you've made your putt, text PUTT 88 or visit justgiving.com/30ftPuttChallenge to make a donation to Dementia UK.

How to get involved

1. Measure out 30-foot.
2. Putt towards a hole on a golf course or a plastic cup on the floor.
3. Register your name and video at 30footputtchallenge.com
4. Make a donation to Dementia UK.
5. Challenge your friends and colleagues to make their own 30-footer.

NATIONAL GOLF MONTH
GET GOLFING MAY 2015
#GETGOLFING @Nat_Golf_Month

PRO PROPERTIES

Who lives in a house like this?

While most 21-year-olds are worrying about paying off student loans, Jordan Spieth has just spent a reported \$2.2m on his first pad, a 3,400sqft pile in Dallas, with a pool and wine cellar. But which of the homes below is Spieth's? And which golf stars own the others?



1. Hunter Mahan 2. Tiger Woods 3. Jordan Spieth 4. Rory McIlroy 5. Ian Poulter

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COURSES

The world of golf

The first survey of its kind has counted every single course on earth

For the first time in history, an official count of the world's golf courses has been compiled, and the findings are fascinating. The unprecedented report, funded by the R&A and 15 of the world's leading golf

companies, took 25,000 hours to prepare. We now know that there are 34,011 golf facilities in the world, spread across 206 countries. That means only 33 countries do not have at least one golf course. Whilst this stat suggests

that golf is a truly global game, over half of the world's courses are located in North America. The R&A hopes the report will make it possible to track golf's growth around the world and identify areas of potential development.

34,011
golf courses
in the world

71%
are open to
the public

12,570
people per
golf hole

206 at least one
33 without one
50 just one

239 countries

460
openings

358
closures

**More openings
than closures in
last five years**

Northernmost course

Ulukhaktok Golf Course, Canada

18,145
North America
Contains 53% of the world's courses, with another 200 underway.

Southernmost course

Ushuaia Golf Club, Argentina

2,084
England
Makes up 28% of Europe's course supply. Germany is 2nd with 747.

4,778
Asia
185 new courses since 2010, more than any other continent.

New courses
696 under construction or planning
269 under construction
427 in planning
30% of projects are in Asia

THERE'S ONE MORE ON ITS WAY IN SCOTLAND... DESIGNED BY THE KING

With more than 250 courses under his belt, Arnold Palmer is currently designing his first in the UK – and the 553rd for Scotland.

Construction will begin early next year on a second layout at Castle Stuart,

already home to one of the UK's finest courses on the shores of the Moray Firth.

"I have had a strong affection for Scotland since I first went there in 1960 to play in the Open at St Andrews," says the seven-time Major champ. "I have

returned many times since, including a memorable victory in the Open at Troon in 1962. The opportunity to build an iconic golf course in Scotland would be the culmination of all these great experiences." It's due to open in 2019.





StewartGolf

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The revolutionary R1 Push is the most technically advanced, compact folding, simplest to use, stylish trolley on the market.

The folding system for the all-new R1 Push is based on a sturdy rack & pinion system, a first for the golf industry. The patent-pending design hides the folding mechanism within the bespoke aluminium alloy frame, dispensing with any external sliding or tensioning parts.

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G30

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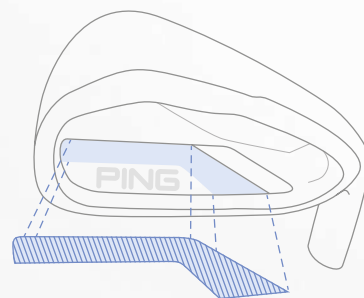
Engineering clubs "Without Sacrifice" requires true innovation from our engineers and researchers. This philosophy is best represented in the G30, our newest game-changing technology.

G30 IRON

Built for distance and control.

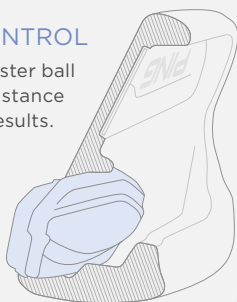
FORGIVENESS AND FEEL

Perimeter weighting elevates the MOI and an elastomer cavity badge ensures a solid feel.



DISTANCE CONTROL

Thin face generates faster ball speeds for more distance with predictable results.



UNDERCUT CAVITY DESIGN

Custom Tuning Port and undercut cavity help position the CG low-back to optimise launch and forgiveness.

G30 HYBRID

High launching, soft landing.

G30 FAIRWAY

Faster face, greater distance.

THREE DRIVER OPTIONS TO FIT YOUR GAME.



G30

STANDARD

Optimised to fit most golfers. The preferred choice of PING professionals around the world.



SF
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STRAIGHT-FLIGHT TECHNOLOGY

Weight closer to the heel and a lighter swingweight produce a right-to-left shot bend.



LS
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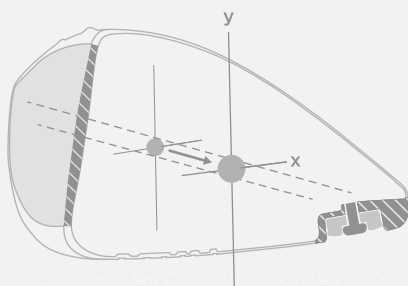
LOW-SPIN TECHNOLOGY

Provides low, stable spin and forgiveness for golfers with faster swing speeds.



LOW/BACK CG

Optimises launch conditions and increases MOI for unmatched distance, forgiveness and consistency.



NEW T9S TITANIUM FACE

Hotter face delivers higher ball speeds for more distance.



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EQUIPMENT

The bent wedge

The training aid that's taking the Tour by storm

A bent wedge is normally the result of a frustrated golfer taking his anger out on his club after one too many duffed chips. The DST Compressor Wedge, however, is designed with a shaft bent to replicate the shape a normal shaft takes at impact. Used as a warm-up club or training aid, this forces you into a position where your hands lead the clubface through impact, creating a crisp, ball-first, downward contact.

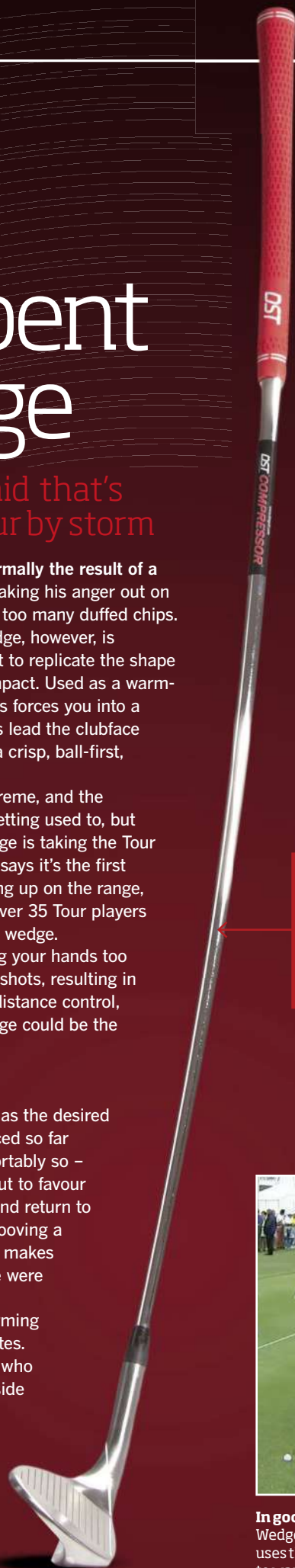
It might sound a bit extreme, and the appearance takes some getting used to, but the DST Compressor Wedge is taking the Tour by storm. Henrik Stenson says it's the first club he uses when warming up on the range, and the Swede is one of over 35 Tour players currently using the bowed wedge.

If you find yourself using your hands too much with chip and pitch shots, resulting in inconsistent contact and distance control, the DST Compressor Wedge could be the answer to your prayers.

OUR VERDICT

There is no doubt that it has the desired effect. Your hands are forced so far forward – almost uncomfortably so – that you have no choice but to favour your left side at address and return to this position at impact, grooving a negative attack angle that makes you take ball then turf. We were striking our regular irons consistently well after warming up with it for just 10 minutes. A great option for anyone who struggles to load the left side and strike the ball crisply.

● **Details:** £74.95 from dstgolf.com. A bowed 8-iron is also available.



Hands lead

The curvature of the shaft means your hands lead through impact, training the feeling of a downward strike.



In good company
Wedge master Stenson uses the DST Compressor to warm-up on the range.

BEHIND THE TECH

The ideal impact position



By Andy Taylor

Finding a good impact position on a consistent basis is crucial to quality striking that allows you to trust your yardages and find the target. What we are looking to avoid is a swing where your hands are behind the ball at impact. This will give you a positive (upwards) angle of attack instead of a descending blow that allows you to compress the ball. An ascending strike is what causes tops and thins and the root cause is during the transition. The lower half should initiate the downswing, allowing your sternum and hands to stay ahead of the clubhead. If you top or thin it the likelihood is that your hands are creating an early release meaning they are behind the clubhead and your weight is on your right side at impact. The DST training aid shows you what the correct position is and what that descending strike feels like. However, we all have our own way of getting into this position and it's important you find yours. This might be pressing the hands forward and favouring your left side at address or bumping your left hip towards the target as you start down.

● Andy Taylor, PGA pro at Kirtlington Golf Club, Oxford.

Strikedown

The DST helps get your hands ahead of the ball at impact.



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Glide™ wedges ensure short-game performance and trajectory control on shots of every distance. The Dyla-wedge grip, CFS wedge shaft and head design combine to deliver our most versatile and consistent wedge line ever. Three bounce widths (TS, SS, WS) in multiple loft options are designed to fit your angle of attack and turf conditions. Get fit today or visit ping.com. You'll be better for it.

DYLA-WEDGE™ GRIP

A 3/4"-longer grip with markings at 1 3/8" intervals encourages gripping down for trajectory control and versatility.

CFS™ WEDGE SHAFT

Optimized in weight, flex and balance for improved control, feel and stability.

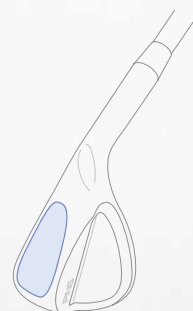
MOISTURE-REPELLING FINISH

Chrome-plated 431 SS head improves spin and consistency in wet conditions.



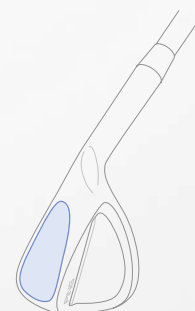
TS

THIN SOLE
Shallow attack angle & divots.



SS

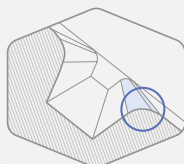
STANDARD SOLE
Moderate attack angle & divots.



WS

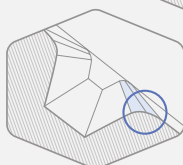
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ON THE GAME

The new face of golf

Rory replaces Woods as the man sponsors want

When the new EA Sports golf game is released this June, it will signal the end of an era. Since 1998, the best-selling golf game has always featured Tiger Woods. That relationship ended in 2013 after EA decided that Tiger's erratic form meant he was no longer the man to generate

sales, ending a 15-year association that yielded £480 million in revenue.

"Rory appeals to the coolness factor," says Brent Nielsen, the game's executive producer. "Rory becoming the face of golf and speaking to a younger generation is a big asset."

"When you grow up playing golf, you



Ultra-real
The graphics
are incredibly
true to life.



never really dream of being in a video game, let alone the guy on the box," says 25-year-old McIlroy, whose first console was the original PlayStation. "I grew up idolising the best golfers in the world, and now I'm one of them. One of the ways I idolised them was in video games. Now I am on the cover of EA Sports Rory McIlroy PGA Tour and it's named after me – that is crazy!"

EA aren't the only company to see McIlroy's marketability. "Sponsors will trip over themselves to be associated with him," says Mick O'Keeffe, Managing Director of Pembroke Communications. "He could earn in excess of £30 million per annum just from commercial partnerships. He is the number one marketing asset in golf, and there is a huge amount of money in golf as it is a global game."

The new EA game

The key changes to the first release since 2013 have left us very excited:

- **No loading times**

30-second waits will be a thing of the past, saving you 10-15 mins per round.

- **Lifelike players**

The players look so true-to-life you'll be tempted to ask for their autograph.

- **Go your own way**

You can play each hole any way you want – even from an adjacent fairway.

- **Photo-realistic courses**

The courses look good enough to touch.

RORY'S SPONSORS



A 10-year deal worth an estimated £15 million per year sees Rory wear – and play – Nike.



Another multi-million pound deal means Rory is never in danger of missing his tee time.



The world's fifth largest bank also backs sports stars Jenson Button and Jessica Ennis-Hill.



Rory is halfway through a four-year deal with the acoustics experts and is often seen in their headphones.

RORY'S VIEW

"Obviously I'm lucky to be in the position I'm in – I get companies approaching me. There are so many we have to say no to, because we can't go around having 25 sponsors – it just doesn't work. Not with all the commitments.

"It's up to me, adding up how many days my current sponsors are looking for. So Nike wants X amount of days, Bose want this, Santander this, Omega this. So that makes up to, say 15 days. Well, that's 15 days when I can't do what I actually did to get me here – practise."

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Our obsession with distance just became your reality. Equipped with our first-ever front-to-back FLIPZONE™ adjustable weight technology, the Fly-Z+™ grants you the freedom to change your driver's centre of gravity. So you can adjust your flight path for ultimate distance without adjusting your swing.

Flip the weight forward for a **penetrating** ball flight that delivers maximum distance with more roll.

MORE ROLL.



Your say...

Embracing Sky, following darts' example and how we could speed up the Tour pros

LETTER OF THE MONTH



Clubs must embrace the youth and their ways for a secure future.

The R&A were right

I am new to the game and – at 29 – part of what is perceived as the 'problem demographic' who hold the key to golf's future.

The R&A has been ridiculed for selling off the rights to the Open to Sky Sports from 2017 and how it will harm the future of the game, but I feel the need to stand up for them, and demonstrate the sport's need to move on to attract youngsters.

In the modern day, the chances of getting youngsters to sit and watch hours of coverage of any sport are gone (unless they are already hooked). A golf tournament over four days will not get young people through golf club doors. The R&A were right to take the money and go with Sky. It is also worth noting how much the BBC spends on

football rights; they could have matched Sky, but their priorities lie away from golf.

Attracting new players is about engaging in a modern way with a young audience and making the game fun. There are various YouTube golf professionals who do just that and create a large following on social media. This is where you will win over a new audience, and it needs to be channeled.

Golf clubs may not always like these 'characters' or the bright clothes and high-fives that come with them, but (as long as they're respectful and abiding by the rules) they are the future and are able to sell the game to a new generation. Perhaps it's time to embrace it?

CHRIS CLARKE

LETTER OF THE MONTH WINS

A putter from Ping's Cadence TR range, worth £139 - £209



TO THE POINT

What's your ambition for this season?

Daz Robson

Just enjoy being on the course. Even if it's not going well, things could be worse. Happy golfing everyone!

Phil Walsh

The same one I've been unsuccessfully chasing for the last 10 years: break 80 and don't have a round over 100.

Gerry Campbell

Handicap has gone from 11.6 to 17.8 in recent years. Got to practise short game because that's where shots count the most.

Dave Loan

Play another two championship golf courses, as is my plan every year. Turnberry, Royal Liverpool, Troon and Lytham are on the aspirational list!

Nigel John Phillips

To become more consistent off the tee. By doing that my handicap should come down.

Paul Wright

To stop being a happy hacker and get to 18 or below!

Jonny Hodson

Get back after a long injury lay off, represent the club's scratch team and win the club's 36-hole scratch trophy. Never thought I'd play again!



Ladies last

Do any of your readers, particularly ladies, get annoyed and frustrated by Sky Sports' coverage of ladies competitions? My wife and I sat down to watch the Mission Hills Ladies Championship and all we got to see was a putting competition. Ninety per cent of the golf shown was just the players' final putt on each green. I firmly believe that we (men included) could learn a lot from watching the ladies game, if we had the chance.

ALAN DAVIE

Make golf like darts

I think all avid golfers and fans know that we need to find a way to make golf more trendy to stop the continuing decline in the number of players in the UK. The big question is how do we find that little bit of razzmatazz or magic to reinvigorate our game, in the way darts has?

Now I'm not suggesting we have half-naked girls dancing around the greens or even gorgeous ladies holding Tiger's hand as he strolls down the fairway, but most of the crowds watching the Premier League darts are under 50 and the numbers are growing.

What about 'knockout golf'? A



Could golf learn from the changes that have been made to darts?

tournament starting with 16 golfers, in which two golfers go head-to-head on a par 5 and par 3, and the lowest aggregate scores goes through to the next round. All 16 golfers would play the first two holes, then eight would play the next two, followed by a semi-final over two holes, and then a final over holes 7 and 8. It would be snappy, fun, and most importantly, over in just a matter of hours. Just an idea...

JAMES WHITELEY, KENDAL

Early bird

I was concerned by Peter Crutchfield's letter ('Cause for alarm', May 2015) questioning why many of us play early morning.

Having been on the 1st tee at my club (Holme Hall, North Lincs) at about 8.30am most Sunday mornings over the winter I would say this to Peter: daylight hours are limited so we have to start early. Yes, it's cold; phrases like 'brass monkeys' and 'we must be mad' are often heard; yes, we wear several layers; yes, the game is a bit of a lottery, especially the putting; and yes, breath is visible.



Starting early leaves the rest of the day free.

But we are with our friends. We discuss the weekend's sport, put the world to rights on matters political, get the local gossip, hip flasks appear at the 7th tee and a welcome cup of hot soup is available at the halfway house. And afterwards the banter continues in the warm clubhouse as we remind ourselves how lucky we are to be fit and well enough to spend our Sunday mornings in this way.

We go home happy, assist with lunch and available for the afternoon. Long may it continue.

CHRIS RABY

Graham Battershill

To compete in the transplant games in Newcastle this year and win a gold in the Golf, which will hopefully give me a chance to participate in the World games.

Brian Taylor

Not to choke when on a good score with two holes left.

Paul Rowles

To have at least one round. A bone disease has put paid to my playing for a few years.

Michael Walker

To teach my daughter (8) and son (4) the game we all love.

jamie Darling

To not have 6,345 swinging thoughts.

A chipper off the old block

I was saddened to read John Tomsett's letter ('Tiger Wood's finished?' May 2015) regarding his failure to find a cure for the chipping yips.

I had also struggled with chips near the green and was torn between using my putter or attempting to chip with an iron.

Having thinned and duffed many a shot I discover the 'Chipper' club (a Bayhill rescue chipper). It has enabled me to play consistent shots when the ball is too far off the green for a putter, but too close for a short iron or wedge. My son Luke loathes it and thinks it's "not a proper golf club", but it's given me so much consistency.

I just hope the club is 'legal' and I know Cleveland make a chipper club. Maybe it's the answer to John's yips. I would not part with mine for love nor money.

GLYN O'SULLIVAN, NEWPORT

Too slow for kids

When an angry Rory McIlroy threw his 3-iron into a lake, the press all went crazy about the example it sets for youngsters. I don't believe what he did was right, but if we are looking to encourage kids to take up our beloved game, we should worry more about them being bored into old age by slow play.

Professionals taking six hours per round is too much for children to watch. A Saturday club competition takes 4.5 hours, so why do the pros



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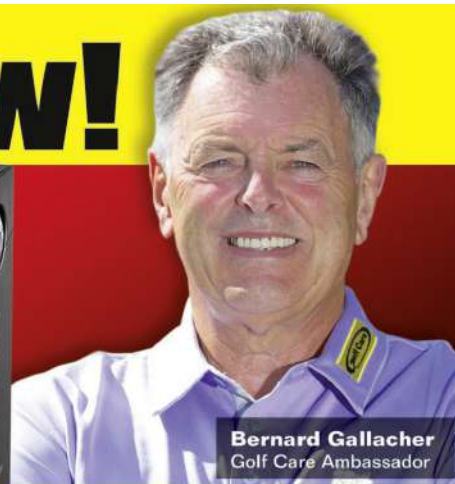
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Would setting tighter time limits speed up the pros?

need to take so long, especially when they are hitting fewer shots?!

It's not just one or two culprits; they're all guilty. We should reduce the time allowed. Unfortunately, the R&A wouldn't dare take on all Tour players at once.

Reducing the time it takes to play a round would increase the number of children watching and playing. I also think junior competitions should be played over 15 holes instead of 18. If we make these changes, hopefully we can protect our game, before it's too late.

ALLAN JAMIESON

More than a feeling

Being stuck on a handicap of 20 for the last 10 years has been quite dispiriting, but hasn't diminished my love for the game. I watch copious amounts of videos, showing how to align myself, address the ball, grip, takeaway, and how to follow through. My natural instincts have taken a battering over the years and I don't give myself a chance to build a solid, consistent swing or good scores as I am always chopping and changing.

This really hit home the other day when my 11-year-old son, who has

been playing for two months, cracked a 3-wood straight down the middle before turning to me with a big smile and saying, "What a feeling dad!"

I'd almost lost sight of why I love golf and it took an 11-year-old to make me realise what matters. I'll tee off on Saturday with joy in my heart, knowing the true me is back.

SIMON THORPE, SOUTHAMPTON

Proud to be a golfer

The recent sporting news has disgusted me, particularly in football. The racist behaviour of Chelsea fans in Paris was a real embarrassment not only to the club, but the sport and UK as a whole. Then there were reports of sexism, spitting and touchline scraps. In a modern, multicultural society, I am always amazed at the chants and language deemed acceptable inside a football stadium, even in a designated 'family zone'.

For me, the golfing principles I have been brought up with set a precedent for respectable behaviour in society, and are a credit to the game. If only other sports could say the same.

RICHARD JOYCE

GET IN TOUCH

Write to Today's Golfer, Media House, Lynchwood, Peterborough, PE2 6EA or editorial@todaysgolfer.co.uk

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Top tweets



FROM THEM...

Max Homa @maxhoma23

If I'm in McIlroy's new video game that'd be tight. But with how my golf game's been lately u can't play me on the weekends haha #humility

Ted Scott @jtedscott

When flying in that middle seat, & fellow passengers try to take on YOUR space. Pretend to sleep and place your arm on theirs.

Jason Palmer @jasonpalmergolf

Any fans of retro golf balls out there? Head on down to @KirbyGolfClub driving range. You never know what you'll find

Ian Poulter @IanJamesPoulter

1 poor swing, then being abused from drunken fans whilst trying to play my 3rd shot twice in back swing. #Ifyoucanthandledrinkwhybother

Richard Bland @blandy73

Watched The Theory Of Everything on the flight home! What a remarkable human being @stephenhawking_ is!! #inspiring

David Duval @david59duval

Tough exposing that just because you have heard of people doesn't make them good at anything. #Kardashian

Joe Miler @JoeMillerLDC

Talking about ball compression, so important for distance guys, increase your AoA and reduce your Dynamic loft !!! = BALL SPEED #golf #golfgods



Graham DeLaet @GrahamDeLaet

Can we bring back the old @PGATOUR website? I think the sample size is large enough now. Maybe cuts ads in half while we're at it?

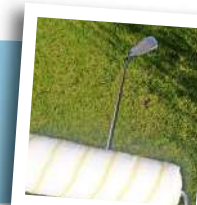
Holly P Clyburn @HPClyburn

How people sit at a desk day in day out I don't know..... #numbass #paperwork

FROM YOU...

David @evel72

@TheTodaysGolfer beautiful sunny day no wind, which do you think I'd rather be using



Matt Oakley @MattOakley9

Perfect timing from @TheTodaysGolfer. Birthday and shanks at weekend!

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"My game is about precision."
- Graeme McDowell -



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Andrew Cotter

Golf is in a prime position to recreate its social side through technology

I have just been out for an hour-long run. This is not to let you know how incredibly awesome I am. Although if you could pass that on to anybody you meet, that would be

great. What I would like to draw your attention to, is that I ran alone (except for my dog, who moved along at walking pace beside me). Yet at the same time I ran with hundreds of people. Because I ran with a GPS device and when I returned home I uploaded all the information to Strava.

What is Strava, I hear you say? Or at least the three or four of you remaining. Strava is genius.

It was started by cycling enthusiasts and born, as most brilliant internet ideas are, in California. It was a website for them to share their cycling routes and performances throughout the two-wheeled community. You chart your direction and speed on your GPS and, if you're wearing a heart-rate monitor as well, all that information is uploaded to the mapping technology on the website or the app. You can then see how fast you were going at various points, what your heart-rate was doing as you stopped to be violently ill and, perhaps crucially, how you did compared to hundreds of other cyclists who have done that route, or even just segments of it.

Strava naturally expanded to running and that's where you find me and my dog. I even once attached the GPS monitor to her collar and then threw her frisbee around. Anybody examining that data would have thought my running slightly erratic, but also been seriously impressed by my top-end speed.

So you see exactly where and at what pace you've run, but there is also the feeling of competition. Not only against yourself, but against random strangers. Which, I confess, brings a strange sense of satisfaction.

And I have been wondering how this can be applied to golf.

I know there are golfing websites and programmes out there. The most similar to Strava would be the website called HowDidiDo, but as far as I'm aware it doesn't quite have the same fanatical devotion that Strava does for those in lycra or trainers. But golf surely lends itself perfectly to the idea.

Indeed, running has stolen one of golf's greatest creations. There is a website called RunBritain which logs

and charts the activities of runners across the country, from amateur to professional. People are given a handicap based on their performances, using an SSS or CSS (sound familiar?)

depending on how hard the course was or the conditions on the day. Mo Farah currently leads the way nationally with a handicap of +8. In addition there are prizes for the biggest improvers each week.

Elsewhere in this magazine we are featuring golfers who have taken enormous chunks off their handicaps. Well on this website they would be given a new driver or some such reward for their efforts. And possibly be trolled as cyber-bandits. What I'm trying to say is that any way of making golf more attractive – and interactive – has to be a good thing.

We know that a vital part of golf for many is coming in after your round and swapping stories about how things went. But imagine being able to tell every golfer in the world about your round. And at the tap of a button you could see who has the lowest round at a course on any day, week, month or year. You could see how they did it with fairways and greens hit, putts taken. OK, so the world might react pretty much like a man at the bar, nodding politely while looking at his watch, but expanding and connecting with the wider world of golf – the global clubhouse – does have potential to add another layer of interest.

We live in an increasingly interactive world and golf always has been one of the most social of sports. So joining in social interaction with other golfers online would seem a natural progression. Of course, for many people golf is an escape from all the noise and clutter of modern life. In many ways it

is wonderful that golf offers something more traditional, firmly rooted in the past – its values and conduct are something that I hope never changes.

But there is nothing wrong with branching out from strong roots into every aspect of the new world as well. Technology, and the possibilities it offers to make sport, and golf, more enticing should always be explored.

And with that, I have to go – I see there's a bloke I've never met who's just run a faster time on that stretch along the canal.

I must destroy him...

'Any way of making golf attractive – & interactive – has to be a good thing'

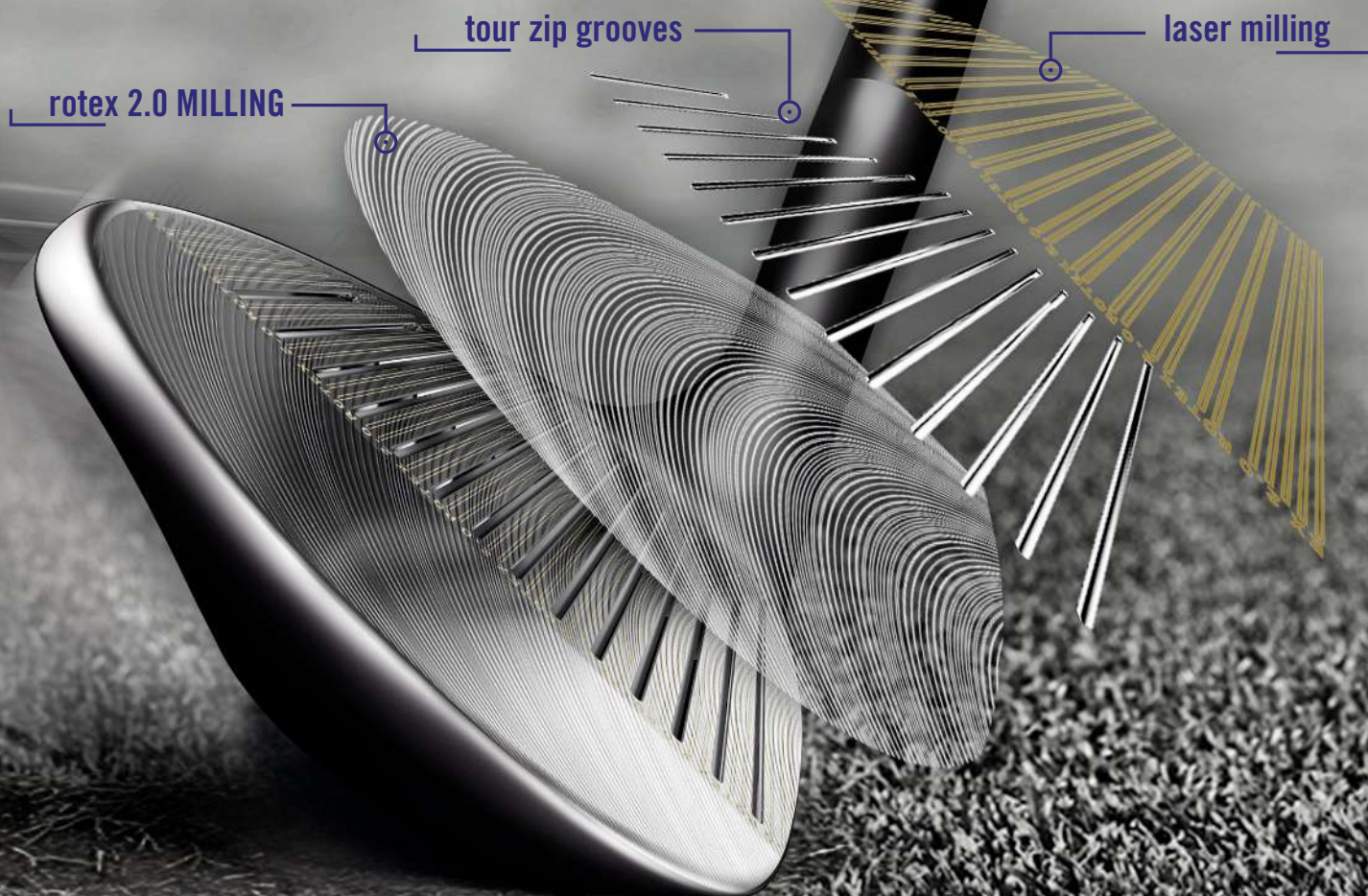


Part of the BBC commentary team, **Andrew Cotter** grew up tackling Ayrshire's links and plays off 3. Follow him on Twitter (@MrAndrewCotter)

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588

RTX 2.0

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Denis Pugh

Good news: you are just as good as a Tour pro! Well, in some respects...

Golf stats have evolved from the early days of fairways hit, greens in regulation and number of putts. The sophisticated and comprehensive stats on offer these days play a huge role in influencing the way Tour pros practise, strategise, and play.

The PGA Tour uses ShotLink to track every shot hit during their events. Players use this data to analyse how they perform against their fellow pros on a variety of skills, and thus see where they need to improve if they want to win more tournaments. And believe me, even the world number one wants to win more tournaments. These stats have made it clear that all Tour pros are actually very similar from 150 yards and in. It's from that distance and above that the superstars are better than the average pros at hitting the ball close, and that's where their scores start to look very different to the players who are usually floating around the cut line.

Even if you're not fortunate enough to play on a tour that tracks your shots for you, you can still use data to improve your own game. Studies have shown that the best way to improve your scores is by driving the ball better. Any mention of this on Twitter generates countless shocked responses from people willing to bet their house that it's the putter that makes the biggest difference, but that is an old myth simply not backed up by the data. "Drive for show, putt for dough" might rhyme nicely, but so does "in the rain, don't stroke a lion's mane". Neither of them are going to make you a better golfer. You need to look at the facts, not your emotions.

"Short game and putting make up just 32 per cent of the difference between winners and the rest of the field," says Mark Broadie, the leading stats man in golf. "Driving and approach shots make up the other 68 per cent."

Let's imagine you're playing a round against a Tour pro. You've both got a three-foot putt. Most of the time, you will both hole it, meaning you've matched him on that statistic. On the next green, you've both got a putt from outside 20 feet. Both of you are unlikely to make it, so simply two-putting will mean you've matched this imaginary Tour pro. On putts between three and 20 feet, he is likely to outperform you, but he won't make all of them and you won't miss them all.

Watching golf on TV, it's easy to assume that pros rattle in long putts on almost every green. That's because watching players miss putts from 30 feet and then tap it in doesn't make for very

exciting viewing. TV channels show you the monster holed putts, because that's what you want to see. If you had umpteen TV cameras covering your next monthly medal, jumping from green to green to produce a highlights package, you'd get your fair share of long holed putts and chip-ins. In reality, at distances over eight feet, pros make fewer than half their putts. It's only because of the last-gasp nature of putting and the effect a holed or missed putt has on your psyche that it is so over-rated as a game-improver.

John Senden (left) holed more putts from outside 25 feet than anyone else on the PGA Tour last season, but he wasn't exactly draining them on every other hole. He made 30 in the whole season, from 99 rounds. Believe me – it's not your failure to hole putts from 25 feet that is stopping you from making it on the PGA Tour.

Where the long game is concerned, it's a different story. If you and Rory McIlroy are both 200 yards out, the results are likely to be very different. And on the tee, being able to bomb it 300 yards down the fairway pays dividends. You'll be hitting a shorter iron for your approach, which will give you a chance of hitting it close and more chance of holing a putt. This isn't just my opinion; the numbers are there to back it up. And yet people still think that being a good putter makes all the difference. My advice is simple: the facts are there for all to see... believe them!

I am a great believer that the driver is the key club. Whatever your current ability, if you can start getting yourself in decent positions off the tee, the game will start to feel much easier. One of the worst and most destructive cliches in golf is that "putting is half the game". There are very few instances when a player can make himself stand out from the crowd putting. Good players separate themselves by hitting bigger and better drives, and capitalising on these by hitting their irons closer to the hole. That is what makes them better than the rest.

'There are very few instances when a player can stand out by putting'



Denis Pugh is a Sky Sports pundit, PGA Master Professional and coach to Ross Fisher and Francesco Molinari. Follow him on Twitter (@DPugh54)

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DRILL

Keep your chin up

Improve your shoulder turn by using a tee

There are two reasons I often see my players with their chin tucked into their chest. Either they have been told to keep their head down or, if they wear glasses, they struggle to see the ball when they lift their head. With the chin down at address it is extremely difficult to make a good turn as the left shoulder has nowhere to go. It will bump into the side of the head causing either the swing to stop there or the player to then lift their head suddenly to make room for the shoulder, creating a world of problems.

Posture check

Imagine a pin stops your chin touching your chest. Practise it using a long tee.



TG TOP 50

JON WOODROFFE
WORLD OF GOLF, NEW MALDEN

Advanced
Fellow of
the PGA and
2014 Regional
Coach of the
Year



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BUNKERS

The easy way out of sand

Take the fear out of bunker shots by following these simple tips

Set-up

Adopt a wide base and flare your left foot a little more than normal to help you turn through.

Impact

You must be positive through impact; imagine the club is a match and the sand is striking paper.



TOUR TIP

MICHAEL BANNON
RORY McILROY'S COACH



The only teacher the world No.1 has ever had and a Nike Golf ambassador.

Amateurs can get into a horrible mess in bunkers. I've seen club golfers try to heave so much sand out of a bunker it is as if they are shovelling the stuff on a building site! In fact, it is a simple shot to get right – certainly in terms of merely getting the ball out and

back on the fairway or onto the green. In future issues we'll look at more advanced bunker shots but, for now, let's just focus on making sure you never leave another bunker shot in the sand. Ingrain these simple

tips into your game and you will take the fear out of sand play.

Finish

Keep your body turning so your chest faces the target; it creates a positive motion through impact.



1: Set-up for success

Open the face of the club before you take your final grip. Do NOT take your normal grip and then manufacture the face open using your wrists. Aim very slightly left of target. Now here's the key: have your weight favouring your left foot, with your knees 'punching' towards the target. Next time you're in a bunker, visualise the arrow I've drawn in the sand here to promote this feeling.



2: Bounce benefits at impact

The wedge's bounce helps the club move through the sand without digging. You use the sand to create a 'corrugated' effect and explode the ball out. You must be positive through impact; feel like you are swinging a big match and the sand is the striking paper. Practise that feeling of 'striking the match' using only your right hand.



3: Keep turning, keep the loft

Keep your body turning so your chest faces the target. This helps to produce a positive move through impact and explode the ball out. The other thing you are trying to do is to keep the loft on the club that we set in the first step. You don't want to turn the clubface over at all. You can see here how my clubface is still 'looking' at the sky.

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Lean back to go long

Low-shoulder feeling can add yards

When it comes to driving, we've all seen the ideal set-up positions for hitting it long and straight.

However, your body positions when you strike the ball – impact alignment – are just as crucial. It is here where my pupil and long drive sensation Joe Miller finds his distance. At impact the more your spine tilts back, the higher your left shoulder can be (right handers). In turn, this pulls the hands and grip more around and up, raising your clubhead speed. The key to this sequence is having your head behind the ball. Focus on doing this and the rest will follow, giving you a quicker swing and more yards.

Low shoulder

My spine angle lets my left shoulder drive upwards, pulling the hands up and quickening the club. You'll see Long Drivers jump at impact in an attempt to get the left shoulder even higher.

Faster impact

I get my players to use an impact bag as it allows them to swing freely and really go for it. This grooves a faster swing over time. You can replicate it at home with an old cushion or pillow.

TG TOP 50

LEE COX
THE SHIRE, LONDON

PGA Fellow
Pro and coach
to World
Long Drive
Champion
Joe Miller.



STRATEGY

Save par from an upslope

Should you risk a tough pitch, hammer a putt or reach for your hybrid?

Wedge

A risk. From 10 shots you might get four close but six will miss the green. Use less loft and more bounce. Take a wide stance, stay low and keep your hands back to stop the leading edge digging into the slope.

Hybrid

The safest play. The long shaft increases the mishit risk, so grip down and stand close, like a putt. Press your hands forward slightly, weight favouring the left side and focus on swinging your shoulders.

TG TOP 50

KEVIN HALE
ST ANDREWS, FIFE



A Senior Instructor at St Andrews Links Golf Academy.

Your approach comes up just short of the target, rolls off the front of the green and down a slope. Now you're left with a tough up-and-down and club choice is vital. When you're assessing it think about what your aim is. Is it to get the ball really close, or

just to be on the green? If you've got to get it really close you might risk a wedge, but there's a chance of getting the strike wrong and missing the green altogether. A putter is a safer option, but the fact it requires a really firm hit increases the likelihood of coming up short, particularly

if you face a really steep incline. Then there's the hybrid. It is something that lots of you wouldn't try, but it's a very useful club. It gives more speed as it's hotter off the face and runs well along the floor giving you good consistency and a great chance of a putt for par.

Putter

A safe play. The only danger is leaving it short as people often hit long putts into the ground, killing the pace. To counter this move the ball up in your stance, lean back a little and allow wrist hinge.

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CHIPPING

Change clubs, not technique

Improve your consistency... with a belt

I see lots of golfers altering their chipping technique depending on the trajectory they want, but there is no need. Take two sticks (you could use clubs or bags, too) and stand them 18 inches apart then wrap your belt around them three-quarters of the way up. From around eight feet with a 7-iron, chip the ball through the sticks under

the belt. To do it you will have to keep your hands in front of the clubface through impact. Now take your lob wedge and play the same shot. The ball should go over the belt without you having to flip your hands through impact. Play every chip this way, changing club according to the desired trajectory and your consistency will improve.

Hands front

Keep your hands just in front of the clubhead through impact with all your chip shots for a consistent strike.

Bar tool

This is your bar. Stay under it for chip-and-runs with a short iron, and go over it for high shots with a lob wedge.

TG TOP 50

ALAN WHITE
LANARK GOLF CLUB

Advanced
Fellow of the
PGA, former
Chairman of
the PGA in
Scotland.



PUTTING VIDEO TIPS
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PUTTING

Five rules to hole more

Do this and you will be knocking them in for fun

Putting is the area of the game that requires the least amount of athleticism, given the lack of dynamism involved in the action. Therefore, you should all be able to become a good putter, even if going to the gym is something you thoroughly disapprove of. What we are looking for in all aspects of the game of golf is reliability and consistency – and putting is no different. There are a thousand ways to hole putts, but apply the following very simple but highly effective principles and you'll be holing putts for fun.

Is your putter fitted for you?

There is so much fantastic technology out there to help ensure your putter is set up at the right length, loft and lie.

Arms hang naturally

It might not sound like a major factor but trust me, get this right and your natural putting stroke will benefit.



TG TOP 50

GARY NICOL
TPEGs, ARCHERFIELD



Tour coach,
co-founder
of Tour Pro
Experience
Golf Schools
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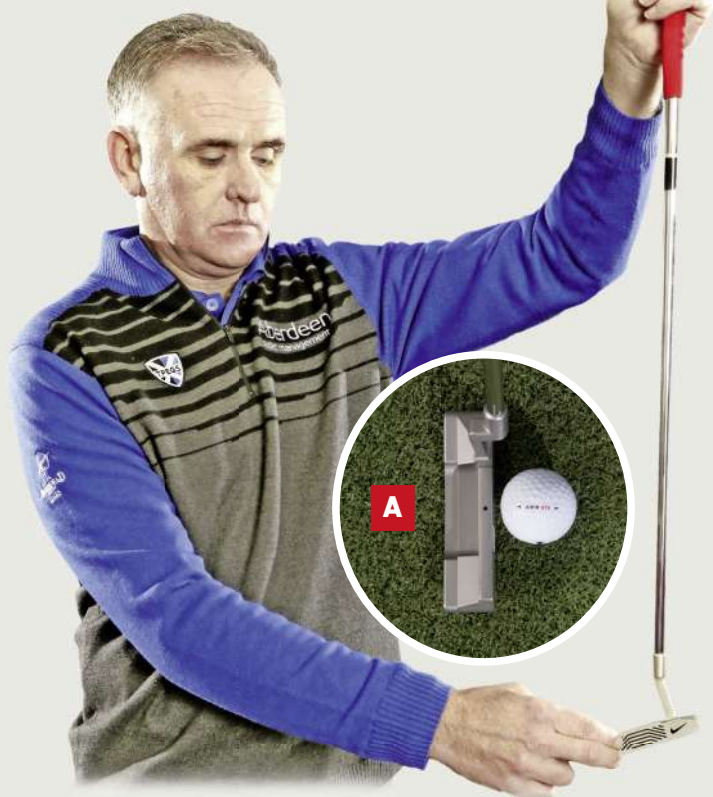
1: Return to square

Many golf coaches recommend you have your eyes directly over the ball at address to help neutralise the path. While I agree with this in principle, most of the really good putters I have studied and worked with tend to have their eyes slightly inside the ball. The most important factor in putting is returning the putter face square to your intended target line. Face angle at impact has five times more influence on the direction the ball travels than path.



2: Get it rolling early

I like to have the ball marginally forward of centre at address. This helps to catch the ball ever so slightly on the upstroke and gets the ball rolling early. The shaft is virtually perpendicular to the ground. If you use a forward press to initiate your stroke, make sure you have sufficient loft on your putter to counteract the de-lofting it creates.



4: Let your arms hang

I'm often asked what the perfect putting posture is. Historically, great putters have come in all shapes and sizes, adopted differing postures and have their own way of doing it but one thing they tend to have in common is arm hang. This image shows my arms hanging naturally from my shoulders without any tension. This is such an important aspect of putting because this is where your arms naturally want to be at address AND return to through impact.



3: Hit the sweetspot

Hitting the ball out of the middle really shouldn't be too difficult with a putter. Off-centre strikes can mean the difference between a holed and a missed putt. The centre is often marked

with an alignment aid (A), but for reassurance, try this. Tap the face on the heel, toe and centre and you'll find the sweetspot through the difference in the sound and how the putter reacts when you locate it.

5: Get fitted for your next putter

If you are going to get any club custom fitted, make sure it's your putter. After all, it's the club you will use more than any other, yet I am amazed how few people even consider getting a putter built to suit their stroke.

IRONS

Bottle up your ball striking

This drill will help you transfer weight correctly

So many amateurs I teach are inconsistent strikers of the ball with their irons, hitting shots fat or thin. The most common cause of these inconsistencies is a failure to transfer their body weight properly. This results in them getting stuck on the back foot at the point of impact. Placing a water bottle behind your back foot and trying not to disturb it as you turn through forces you to shift your hips towards the target. Grooving this move will improve your striking.

Heel heal

Transfer your weight correctly and the bottle stays in place... and your iron shots will be struck more sweetly, more often.



The crucial movement

Roll your right ankle before turning on your foot. This initial movement stops you from knocking the bottle over and makes you transfer your weight onto your left in the downswing.

TG TOP 50

IAN CLARK
WORLD OF GOLF, NEW MALDEN



Advanced
Fellow of the
PGA. Master
Professional
at World of
Golf, Surrey.

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MIND GAMES

Can you let it go?

How many shots does your temper cost you each round? Get it under control

As club-throwing goes, Rory McIlroy's effort at the WGC at Doral was a pretty good one and in the world of instant communication his 3-iron had barely touched the bottom of the lake before the video had gone viral.

From club golfers to Major winners, if I think back to some of the players I have worked with and consider what element of their mental game has cost them the most I would say anger. I've worked with one top player who, by his own admission, estimates angry outbursts and subsequent dropped shots have cost him in excess of £10 million over his lengthy career!

I have seen golfers hit one bad shot at the beginning of a round and sulk for the next four hours – not speaking, banging clubs, swearing and generally torturing themselves and their playing partners.

Think about how much anger has cost your game over the years? How many times has an emotionally charged outburst cost you three or four vital shots? You work on improving your putting stroke or stopping your slice to save shots but how many shots do you throw away in the course of a year because you have never worked on dealing with anger?

No matter how good your swing becomes you will always hit bad shots. If a number of bad shots trigger strong emotional outbursts you are in a vicious loop of insanity that can be very difficult to get out of. The problem with anger and golf is there is no natural release for the emotion like there is in other sports.

You can't run faster, tackle harder or punch quicker like you can in football, rugby or boxing. In golf there is just you, the course and that damn ball – and the big problem with anger is that it makes us stupid.

When we get angry our ability to think clearly and make rational decisions is severely compromised in a game that demands that very skill. As anger reigns supreme our brain is hijacked

as the part of the brain we use to make logical decisions is sidelined by the part more interested in survival. This fight or flight response is one of the reasons we have survived as a species, but it is positively deadly for our ability to shoot low scores. Sports psychiatrist, Dr Steve Peters, who worked with Olympic cyclists Victoria Pendleton and Bradley Wiggins, created the now well-known metaphor of the 'inner chimp' and how managing it was central to sporting success. When the chimp is roaming we come off a bogey and go for a 3-wood requiring a precise draw into a tight pin with water in front on the next hole. The

'One top player estimates angry outbursts have cost him £10 million'

initial dropped shot and angry outburst now spirals into a run of holes that destroys the day. The problem with golf – and the joy of it – is the fact that every shot has a direct consequence to our overall score. We can't get away with mistakes as

they go down on the card and when anger is running your brain does stupid things.

So what's the solution?

In my experience it can be a simple two-step process. You won't eliminate anger, but you can manage it:

- Step one is a 'pre-round commitment'. Write down that, while you are committed to doing all you can on every shot, you are going to accept and deal with the result, whatever it is. The very act of writing this down beforehand strengthens the intention and makes it more likely you'll do it.

- Step two is a very simple, but deceptively powerful question. When I am working with top players we often talk about the importance of 'quality questions'. These powerful tools make you focus on what you want to achieve as opposed to what you don't. The simple question I want you to use when you feel your inner demons rising up is:

Could I let this go? It then becomes a choice. You can either keep raging or get back to what you need to focus on. This question is a powerful 'pattern interrupt' and you will feel even sillier than normal later on if you choose to keep the anger.

Chuck it in

Don't let a few poor shots during a round ruin your entire game.



TG TOP 50

KARL MORRIS
WWW.THEMINDFACTOR.COM

Karl has worked with Major winners including McDowell and Oosthuizen.



BASICS

Swing around the circle

It's a great way to visualise it

The 'Circle Swing' is a concept that confirms the best ideas are often the simplest. Imagine yourself addressing a ball while standing in the middle of a circle. The clubhead and ball are sitting on the perimeter and its radius is from your sternum to the clubhead. Make a swing and visualise the clubhead tracking the circle throughout its journey around the body. In reality the clubhead won't follow a perfect 360 degrees, but play along with that idea. It may be simple, but the Circle Swing is a profound basis for learning the golf swing and helps us create a range of desirables, including optimal plane, great rhythm and flow, timing, width, and freedom from technical thought.

Flow

Notice that there are no breaks in the circle as the swing should be a continuous motion. Have no swing thoughts other than the club tracking the circle all the way around.

Radius

The swing's radius is strongly influenced by the arms. If the clubhead stays on the circle's perimeter the arms extend naturally (left arm back, right arm through) and the swing's radius takes care of itself. Focus on keeping the clubhead on the perimeter and the swing will become wider.

Circumference

If the clubhead – which automatically starts on the perimeter of the circle – can stay on it, you will create the feeling of 'room' in your swing, allowing the body to move freely leading to great body mechanics. Feel like the body responds as the clubhead tracks the circumference.

TG TOP 50
SCOTT CRANFIELD
CRANFIELD GOLF ACADEMY



PGA Master Professional and former Tour coach with five UK golf centres.

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Sand scenario

As you would with a bunker shot, keep your weight on your lead side to get a steep angle of attack into the ball.

ESCAPE TIPS

Go hell for heather

Playing out of heather is damage limitation

T

he best piece of advice

I can give? Don't find the heather in the first place!

There is plenty of it around Royal County Down and although it looks colourful, it is tricky to escape from. If you do find it, it's very much a case of chopping the ball out. The construction of a heather plant is like wire, so when the club comes into the ball, the heather can take off all the clubhead speed and close the head down. If you try to bite off more than you can chew, you'll end up staying in the heather. My advice is to opt for a sand wedge or pitching wedge and get the ball back in play as soon as possible.

Chop, chop

You want to get your weight slightly forward and leave the clubface a little open, to counteract the hosel twisting.



TG TOP 50

KEVAN WHITSON
ROYAL COUNTY DOWN

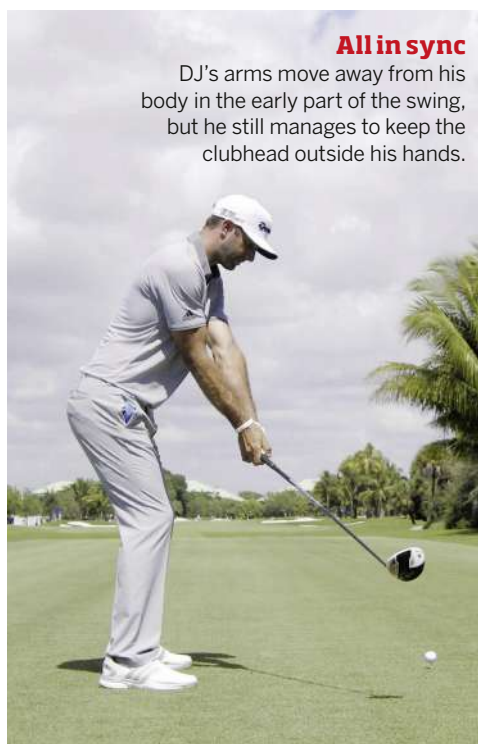
An Advanced Fellow of the PGA who came to Royal County Down in 1992.





Athletic address

Dustin is a superb athlete and this is reflected in his set-up. It's a fantastic starting position – knees flexed, bent forwards from the hips, arms hanging.



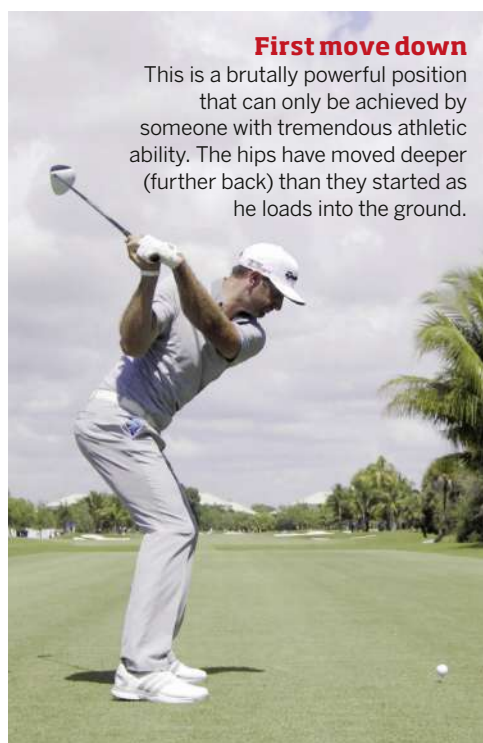
All in sync

DJ's arms move away from his body in the early part of the swing, but he still manages to keep the clubhead outside his hands.



Copy this move

This is a great position to copy. The shaft is right on plane, horizontal to the ground and parallel to the target line.



First move down

This is a brutally powerful position that can only be achieved by someone with tremendous athletic ability. The hips have moved deeper (further back) than they started as he loads into the ground.



Into impact

The left wrist has now lost a lot of the bowed or arched look it had at the top of his swing, helping the clubface square up. The right forearm now points at the ball ready to unleash a crushing blow.



Take that, ball!

Boom! Impact sees a huge amount of hip clearance and really active footwork. This gives tremendous space for his arms to swing freely.

SWING SEQUENCE

How he does it... Dustin Johnson

TG TOP 50
ADRIAN BISHOP
PGA NATIONAL COACH



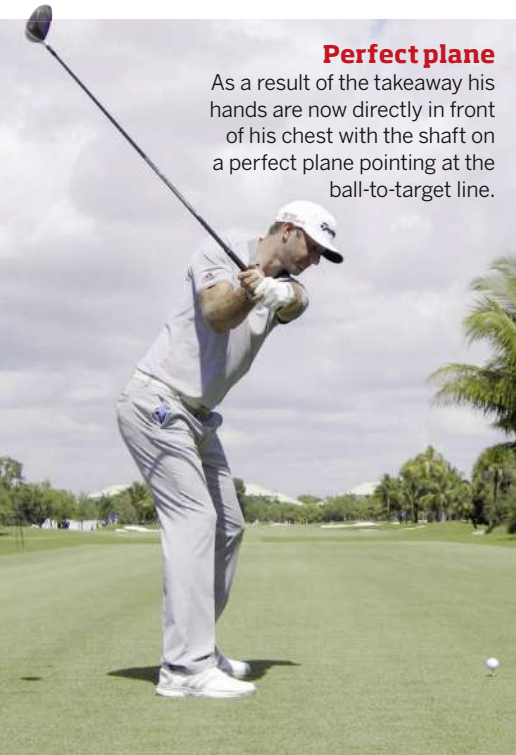
PGA
National
swing and
coaching
tutor based
in Somerset.

He is one of the fittest, strongest and longest players on the PGA Tour – and after a six-month suspension from the game, Dustin Johnson now has the desire that could make him truly great. His recent WGC win at Doral was the first step on that journey. Under the

watchful eye of coach Butch Harmon, DJ has honed a wonderfully controlled swing that produces tons of clubhead speed. He is first in driving distance on tour (an unbelievable 317.3 yards average so far this year), but these days there's a lot more to his game than pure power.

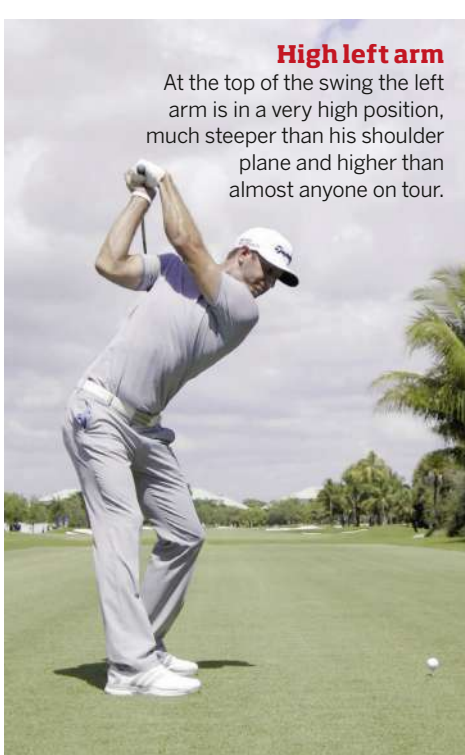
Perfect plane

As a result of the takeaway his hands are now directly in front of his chest with the shaft on a perfect plane pointing at the ball-to-target line.



High left arm

At the top of the swing the left arm is in a very high position, much steeper than his shoulder plane and higher than almost anyone on tour.



Bowed left wrist

Dustin's left wrist is very bowed and generally leads to a closed clubface, which can be seen here. You'd expect to see the face parallel to the back of the left forearm, but his points skywards.

2

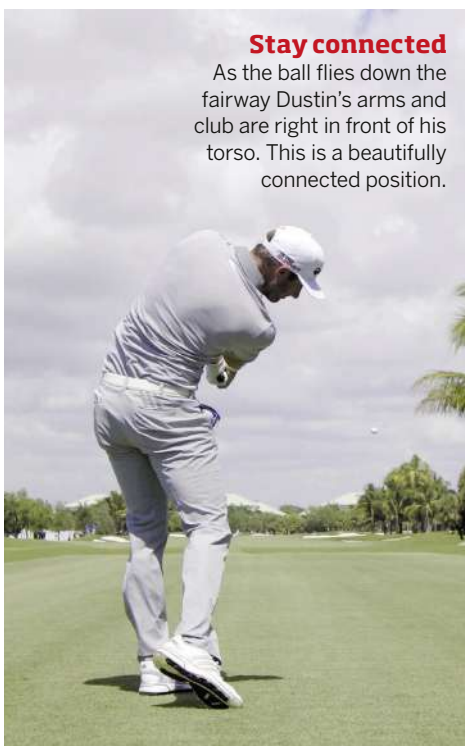

Powerful release

A beautiful release sees both arms extended and the clubhead as far away from him as it is possible to get.



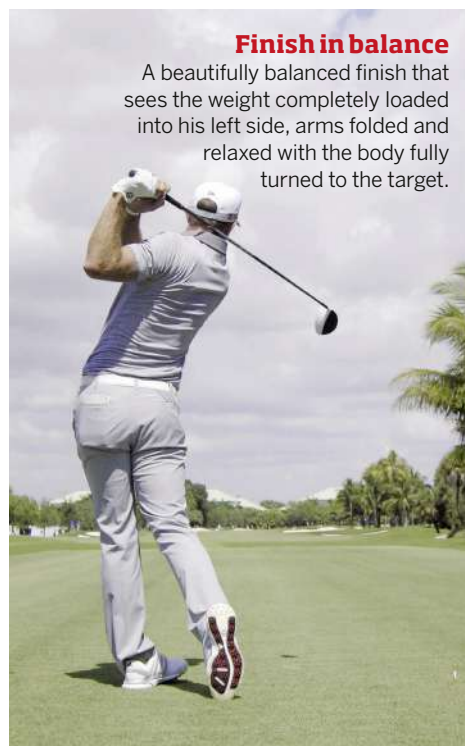
Stay connected

As the ball flies down the fairway Dustin's arms and club are right in front of his torso. This is a beautifully connected position.



Finish in balance

A beautifully balanced finish that sees the weight completely loaded into his left side, arms folded and relaxed with the body fully turned to the target.



1 Create a sound set-up and posture

Get your weight evenly balanced between the feet, bend forward from the hips allowing your arms to hang freely and then finally flex the knees so the weight loads into the quad muscles.

2 Don't worry about the textbook

Dustin has several personal swing characteristics, but it works as all the components match up, like his fast body rotation helping compensate for the closed clubface.

3 Power comes from the ground up

Dustin is about as good as it gets at developing power. He does this like all good players by moving each bit of his body in the correct order – legs, hips followed by torso, arms and the club.

HIS 2015 TOUR STATS

69.69 Scoring average (3rd on PGA Tour)
50.67% Driving accuracy (205th)
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65.63 Greens in regulation (112th)
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THE CLOSING DATE IS MAY 14, 2015



RORY & ME

From his first lesson as a seven-year-old to Major glory, coach Michael Bannon has been at McIlroy's side every step of the way

WORDS CHRIS BERTRAM PHOTOGRAPHY WARREN LITTLE, GETTY

It is no secret that Rory McIlroy was a big fan of Tiger Woods as he grew up on the shore of Belfast Lough in Holywood, Northern Ireland. And in his natural talent, his prodigious early achievements and his increasingly brawny physique there are significant similarities between the two outstanding players of the last quarter of a century. He even chose to play Nike clubs, just as his idol did in 1996.

But there are differences, too, one of the biggest being their different approach to coaching. Woods turned pro in 1996 and after unprecedented success over eight years, split with Butch Harmon. He is now on his fourth full-time coach.

McIlroy, on the other hand, shows no sign whatsoever of parting company with Michael Bannon, who has guided his golf swing for so long that it was he who used to cut down irons for him when he was a bairn.

When McIlroy turned pro in 2007, many expected the world's most feted amateur to seek out a big name on the Tour coaching circuit. Certainly, the list of those interested in the task of keeping an eye on his swing will not have been a short one.

But Bannon has been by McIlroy's side

from the days when 130 yards represented a tremendous drive to the youngster, right along to the four-week spell during 2014 when he won two Majors.

The partnership is patently working, and one only needs to spend a short amount of time in Bannon's company to understand why McIlroy places such faith in him. TG was fortunate to do just that as Bannon helped his man tune up for the new season. It was the second occasion we had met, the first being in the more prosaic and chilly surroundings of Bangor GC just days after the Boy Wonder's demolition job on the 2011 US Open at Congressional.

There might have been four years between meetings – Bannon does not seek publicity – but the same friendly, engaging, humorous, modest demeanour was just as evident in 2015 as it was back then, when his working environment was a small but characterful pro shop next to Bangor Golf Club's clubhouse and a large but hardly Tour-calibre practice range.

Having since left Bangor to give McIlroy his full attention, spending his life jetting around the globe with one of the world's most celebrated athletes has not made even **■**

a hint of a dent in the personality Bannon was born with.

So, when we phoned ahead to say we were running a minute or two late for our appointment, he sympathetically agreed that the traffic was bad. When we eventually turned up in a small hire car that had seen much better days, he asked if it was ours with a little smile and a raise of an eyebrow that suggested he was quite glad not everyone in the new world he inhabits was chauffeured around in ludicrously shiny new saloons (then happily threw his Nike Tour bag across the back seat and hopped in the passenger seat).

You probably don't need to be told that this kind of humility is fairly rare in the increasingly precious world of Tour golf.

It is not difficult to imagine that McIlroy welcomes and enjoys this kind of grounded presence, a link with his solid upbringing and

'I thought he'd get to scratch about 12, but you never know how good they'll be until they start winning'

of parents – Bannon went to their wedding – who worked multiple jobs to fund his golf career. And while Bannon's coaching method is not soaked in trendy jargon or complicated by ego, he can analyse a golf swing between blinks of an eye. When TG went off for coffees midway through our instruction shoot, we returned to find photographer Warren – a lapsed five handicapper – hitting balls with Bannon enthusiastically advising between shots. Warren's soft draw had been relocated!

Lots of coaches 'know' the swing of course. But no-one knows McIlroy's as well as the 56-year-old and, probably more importantly, no one knows how to communicate with him as effectively. What's more, one suspects McIlroy leans on his coach as much for psychology – Bannon would no doubt describe it as common sense – as he does for technical matters. It might go further. It would not be a surprise if the man who was a good enough player himself to have finished runner-up to Pádraig Harrington in the 1998 Irish PGA Championship is also an unwitting moral conscience to the World No.1.

Having known him all his life, it is doubtful

if the young charge will want to disappoint his long-time master. It might sound crazy to suggest – although McIlroy himself might be one who agreed – but Rory might need Michael more than Michael needs Rory. Neither will be thinking of it that way though, because theirs is a special relationship. Listening to how they created it – and how they maintain it – is an education...

How did it all begin?

I lived across the road from Rory's parents and I went to their wedding. Gerry was a scratch golfer at Holywood, where I was the pro. Then along came Rory and he loved golf right away, chipping and putting all day in the summer even though he wasn't a member at that stage. He joined when he was eight, but I moved to Bangor Golf Club. Rory came to practise there and that's when we started to create his swing together.

When did you know he was going to be good?

I thought he'd get to scratch about 12, but you never know how good they'll be until they start winning competitions. He won the World Under 10s but it was when he kept winning aged 14 and 15 I thought he had a chance.

In these early years, how much did you have to work on his swing?

It's a swing that is natural to Rory, so we only ever made small adjustments. When he was 11 his swing was a little upright, then it got a bit 'in behind' him when he was a teenager. He was playing well at that time so we just left it for a while even though he was aware of it. Then we tackled it at the right time. I know from playing myself that sometimes you need to be left alone. His swing got a little flat at times and a flat swing relies too much on consistency, so he could have got away with it when his timing is good, but you can't rely on it all your life and win big events.

Did his seamless transition from top amateur to Tour winner surprise you?

After the Walker Cup we were talking about going to the next stage of Tour School. He told me 'don't worry about that, I'll get my card in one of the tournaments coming up'. He did have some invites for Tour events coming up but... Well, he was third in the Dunhill Links and basically got his card. That to me was amazing.

Look and learn
Bannon keeps an eye on his pupil on the range in Dubai this year.



Helping hand
Bannon takes a lot of pride in the input he's had into one of the best swings in golf.



'He was third in the Dunhill and basically got his card. That to me was amazing'

Do you notice individual swings that he makes during a tournament and then later ask him about them?

Yes. I'll ask what 'went on with the swing on the 3rd tee?' and Rory will feed back what he was thinking and what he was feeling. We will really look into something when it becomes a more regular occurrence. If it's one-off we'll probably ignore it, if it starts happening regularly we'll look into it properly. We also get really good feedback from JP (caddie) as well. But the best feedback is from the player, it always is – as long as they are honest enough... and Rory always is. He'll say 'I'm not hitting this properly' so we'll concentrate on that aspect of the game, while also keeping an eye on other aspects of the game.

Is he getting to know his own swing better?

Of course. Definitely. No doubt. As he goes on he is getting to know more and more and it is becoming more simple to fix if anything does go a little wrong. He is into the technical side a bit more now, more than he used to be – he understands what does what and what keeps what stable, what moves and what doesn't

move. He's very knowledgeable now in fact, about the positions he needs to be in.

Is a grasp of technique essential for a player?

It's important for a player to have an understanding of the swing... as long as you don't overthink it or over-worry about it. My ethos is that it is important, but you don't want to be over aware. Even more so for amateurs!

Would you work with another player?

(Quick as a flash) No, no, just Rory.

Has your relationship changed down the years?

No, not really. Rory is just the same as he always was, albeit he is now 25 and he has matured into a man. He is not a young fella anymore, he has settled down now. I have seen him grow up; I have seen him stay exactly the same as he always was. He has not changed a bit.

Do you two ever disagree with each other?

Sometimes. It might be my concerns about a certain thing he would be trying out. I would say 'are you sure about this?' and he would maybe try it and



BANNON ON...

Feeling the heat

"Rory has such a great talent that I have felt an immense responsibility for many years. It has made me nervous sometimes, that I have to make sure I am telling him the right things because I could see what he was capable of doing. I have been awake at night making sure I've told him the right things."

Rory's key strengths

"He has great great symmetry, great lines and great flow to his swing. These are nothing new, these have been the fundamentals of the game for years."

Honing a superstar

"I saw this swing in Rory. He had the ability to do it, I just had to nurture it. All I've done is tweak it along the way and with the amount of practice he's done it's worked out fine."

BIG INTERVIEW

then he'd say he'd try it another way. Sometimes, but not often. We are almost always on the same hymn sheet. Everything is done in consultation with Rory. Sometimes I'll ask him to do something and he'll say to me 'no, don't get that, I need a different feel' so I'll think of one. He'll go away and practise it and come back and say 'I can do it now'.

Was it a difficult decision to go full-time with Rory?

No, because it actually gives me more time at home with my family. Yes I am on the road with Rory for a few weeks of the year, but the rest of the time I can be at home. When I was at Bangor, I was never at home! And the big advantage is that I can be with Rory when he wants me to be there. We can make sure he is on track at certain points in the year.

Do you have a fixed schedule with him?

Normally at the start of the year we set a schedule for the first three to four months. Dr Steve McGregor and I are the team that goes with Rory, along with JP [caddie]. We'll decide together what we will do and when. He and I are the performance team – that's what Rory calls us! Dr Steve does all the biomechanics, nutrition and fitness – and he's a good man. I am the swing mechanic and he's the body mechanic.

Are you a nervous spectator?

Earlier on I was more nervous, but I realised there was no point in getting worked up. What will be will be. I follow him round, watch every shot, and love to be out there watching. And there's no difference to being at home or at the course – you are still as concerned. You're watching your player, you have concern for them... but I'm not as nervous as I used to be because you are watching to analyse so you can feed back to your player.

You must feel great pride at his results?

Yeah, oh yeah. The big thing for me, I think, is that one morning a couple of months ago I woke up and thought 'Rory has won The Open'. On our side of the water, every wee boy growing up says every putt is 'for The Open'. It's not for the Masters or the PGA or the US Open. It's for The Open. That was the big moment for me, especially after all the crack about him not being able to control it in the wind and keep it low. Nonsense. Rory is one of the best wind players I have ever seen.

And this is surely just the start of the story?

It has been a gradual progression; he won a few tournaments, then he was in the Majors and then you are with him when he won them. You're in the mix and you're with him and before you know it, it becomes normality and you aren't thinking about it. If he wins a few more it would be lovely, great. You know?

Clarethug
Seeing his man win The Open has been one of Bannon's biggest thrills.



THE FOUR WISE MEN GUIDING RORY'S CAREER

The lifelong teacher Michael Bannon

"I always wanted him to go away from a lesson with just one thing. Rory listened and was very good at taking the lesson home and coming back having learned."



The faithful caddie JP Fitzgerald

Rory says: "JP has been on my bag since the middle of 2008 when I was 200 thin the world. He's been with me through everything, and is one of my closest friends."



The fitness guru Dr Stephen McGregor

He's worked with Manchester City and directed Lee Westwood's physical transformation. He started working with McIlroy in 2010.



Team McIlroy Stability is the key

Rory wants a stable backroom team, so he can focus purely on the business of winning golf's biggest titles. Coach Michael Bannon leads the way, but there is solid support elsewhere.

The role model dad Gerry McIlroy

"Rory's parents are the biggest reasons he is the way he is," says Darren Clarke. "They are normal, down-to-earth and genuinely nice people."



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Back on track
Golf has made a huge
difference to the
lives of (l-r) Andy
Stevens, Mike Brown
and Tom James.



GOLF HAS CHANGED OUR LIVES

How the recovery of injured and sick service personnel is being helped by the game

WORDS ROB MCGARR PICTURES ANGUS MURRAY



I'm at the Welcombe Hotel and Golf Club, Warwickshire, where I have just watched Tom James launch an arrow-straight drive 220 yards down the middle of the fairway, and I am in awe. You might be thinking that 220 yards isn't an overly impressive distance, but Tom is a mightily impressive individual. A former fusilier, he was injured in

Afghanistan in 2009 by an improvised explosive device (IED) planted in a tree. Waking from a coma two weeks later, Tom's journey to recovery would be a long one. The explosion cost him his sight in one eye, necessitated an amputation at his right elbow, and saw him lose several fingers in his left hand. Now that drive seems a bit more impressive, doesn't it? "I had attempted to play golf with two arms and two eyes, but couldn't hit a ball," he jokes.

Eighteen months ago, Tom's recovery officer suggested he contact ➤



Mike says:
"Beating able-bodied golfers gives me a huge buzz."



Tom says:
"It's great to have the banter, which you miss so much."

the On Course Foundation, a charity that uses golf to aid the physical and mental recovery of injured service personnel. "I went along to a one-day taster event and saw how well others with one arm were hitting the ball. It made me think, 'If they can hit it like that, why can't I?' I stuck with it and I've been to nearly every event for the last 18 months."

The On Course Foundation was the brainchild of John Simpson, former senior vice president of International Management Group (IMG) and erstwhile manager of Nick Faldo, Bernhard Langer, Vijay Singh and Greg Norman. Simpson suffered polio as a child, which curtailed his pursuit of sporting excellence in all his favourite sports other than golf. "Golf helped me so much throughout my life, and I realised it could really help some of these guys on their road to recovery," he says. "I wanted to give something back, so it made perfect sense for me to set up the On Course Foundation. It's fantastic. They come along, not knowing what to wear, what to do, or what the rules are, but thanks to our fantastic coaches, almost everyone hits that 'wow' shot in their first hour, and they're hooked."

Simpson launched the Foundation in 2010, and it has since helped over 380 wounded, injured and sick service personnel and veterans. "85 per cent had never played golf before," says managing director Steve Holt.

'I was going down a slippery slope; then I found the On Course Foundation'

"We give them a one-day introduction to golf, where PGA pros teach them the basics, and if they like it, they attend a three-day session. The intent is to get them to a decent level, so they can join a club and get a handicap."

PGA Master Professional Alasdair Barr is in charge of the coaching attendees receive. "I taught a world number one [Luke Donald] for five years before he went to America," he says, "and I get more pleasure doing this."

The Foundation offers more than just some golf skills and entry into the game. "The proposition is getting them meaningful, full-time employment within the golf industry," says Holt. "There are 75,000-80,000 jobs in the UK related to golf; servicemen and women have got so many skills that are transferable."

"The average age of guys we come into contact with is 23. If you're discharged from the army in your mid-20s, you can't just do nothing for the next 40 or 50 years. It's quite scary the percentage of homeless people and prison population who are ex-service, because

they just haven't found the right safety net. We can provide that safety net for them."

Thirty-seven-year-old Mike Brown was injured in Iraq in 2011, before a recurrence during pre-deployment training in 2013 eventually led to him having his left leg amputated. "I'd never played golf before, but I fell in love with it at the taster session," he says. Mike's passion and sporting prowess (he was an accomplished motocross rider before his injury) have seen him go from novice to an 8-handicap in less than 18 months.

"It's completely changed my life," he says. "I was going down a slippery slope, into depression. This has given me a new lease of life. I won the medal at my club at the weekend with a net 66."

The Foundation has helped secure 12 permanent jobs for ex-service personnel, and Mike is one of over 30 individuals to secure a work placement through the charity. "I'm currently doing a three-month internship in operations management; it's definitely something I want to get into long-term."

Not all of the injuries are physical. Andy Stevens served for over 30 years before the array of disturbing things he'd seen caught up with him, resulting in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). "The care you get in the service is very good," he says, "but once you're discharged, you're on your own."



"I started golf a decade before I had my breakdown. The golf course was the only place I could find real peace. There is enough to think about on the course to keep me busy thinking about my game, which stopped me thinking about anything else. I only ever played on my own, though."

An experienced golfer, Andy was fast-tracked onto a three-day session. "Everyone was so welcoming and non-judgmental. I met other PTSD sufferers and realised that I was not on my own. Having a support network who understand what you've been through is incredibly important."

"The guys tell us the Foundation gives them a reason to get out of bed," says Holt. "In some cases, it gives them a reason to live. It sounds morbid, but I do think some of these guys wouldn't be here – due to self-harm – if they hadn't had the opportunity to make a fresh start through golf."

The Foundation maintains close links to the United States services, and a Ryder Cup-style match takes place each year. Those selected for the most recent match, at Congressional in 2014, had the honour of meeting Arnold Palmer, who serves as a patron for the charity. "I was profoundly moved by their courage and determination in facing enormous adversity," says the seven-time Major champion. "To see that our game can be used as an integral tool in the rehabilitation of soldiers from around the world fills me with great pride."

Andy has found the support network and regularity of events plays a vital role in mediating against the most serious dips in mood. "It stops you dropping too far into depression," he says. "You've always got the next event to look forward to. All of us in the On Course Foundation recognise how good it is for us. As far as I'm concerned, the more people we can get into the Foundation, the better."

THE FACTS

The On Course Foundation's success so far...

381
MEMBERS

85%
NEVER PLAYED
GOLF BEFORE
THEIR INJURY

80
EVENTS SINCE
ITS INCEPTION

1000
ATTENDEES
ACROSS ALL
THEIR EVENTS

34
GOLF WORK
EXPERIENCE
PLACEMENTS

12
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Meet Britain's most improved golfers

These players knocked a combined **86 SHOTS** off their handicaps last year. Over the next seven pages they'll reveal how they did it – so you can do the same

WORDS ROB MCGARR PICTURES BOB ATKINS, HOWARD BOYLAN, DAN PULLEN

If there's one thing we'd all like to do, it's improve our handicap. Golf is the only sport where a single number tells the world how good – or bad – you are. It's a question of pride. It doesn't matter what car you've got waiting in the club car park, how expensive your clothes are or how new your clubs are; when you stand on the first tee and your playing partner asks that immortal question "What's your handicap?", it feels a lot better to say "plus two" than "golf! Hahaha... No actually it's 28".

Being stuck at a certain handicap is demoralising. Surely you should always be getting better? The more you practise, the better you get, right? Unfortunately, as we all know, golf isn't as simple or as fair as that. Seeing your handicap going up is even more depressing. "How can I be getting worse?!" you ask yourself, driving home in anger after another terrible competition round that will lead to the inevitable 0.1 increase.

It's refreshing, then, to see ordinary golfers who have shown their handicaps who's boss. The golfers featured here started at different standards, took different approaches, and had different goals. The one thing they have in common is that they have all improved substantially during the last 12 months.

By looking at what they did and implementing some of it into your game, there's no reason that you can't be one of the biggest improvers this year. The cut is out there. ▶



CUT!
8.4
SHOTS

'A £4 app completely transformed my swing'

Kevin Lancaster, 35. Peterborough Milton GC, Cambs. Old handicap: 18 New handicap: 9.6



After taking up golf and messing around for a while, I decided I really wanted to get better and dedicate myself to improving my swing. I took some lessons from a pro who favoured the 'stack and tilt' method, but I really struggled with this. As a result, I developed a reverse-pivot and started swinging over the top. I found it really hard to overcome these traits for several years. Even now, I still have lapses where I fall back into these bad habits.

A few things have contributed to my improvement. I got fitted for a driver for the first time last summer, and that made an instant and dramatic difference to my distance and accuracy off the tee. I took two months off playing in January and February last year to take some lessons with Andrew Hare and practise lots. This helped transform my swing and give me an in-to-out path which cured the high fades and slices I'd always struggled with. I was actually considering packing up golf before this, due to how badly I was playing.

But the biggest thing was an app

I downloaded to my iPhone called V1 Golf. Having had the lessons, I now know what I am looking for, and use the app to record and analyse my swing. My pro has given me drills to use when I spot something going awry, so I now feel that any time I spend practising is genuinely making me a better golfer. As a result, I'm more enthused about practising, and now pop to the range most lunchtimes.

Beyond this, I've just learnt to not expect so much and try too hard. If I play poorly, so be it. The key for me is staying relaxed and enjoying my golf; this normally leads to better scores without forcing it. I used to get quite tense during competitions, but I now treat them just like any other round. Well, as much as possible!

My highlight so far was a gross 77 in a medal competition. With my old swing and the pressure I used to put on myself in competitions, there is no way I'd have been able to put together a score like that.

My aim now is to achieve a single-figure handicap, as I'm agonisingly close, but I won't get too hung up on this. I'm just enjoying my golf and looking forward to playing in more competitions.

'I used my scorecard and YouTube to help fix my game'

Andrew Crossley, 28, Knott End GC, Lancs. 17 to 9.4

CUT!
7.6
SHOTS

I started playing golf about three years ago, worked hard at my game and got my handicap down to 17, but then found that I hit a bit of a plateau. I was struggling with my approach shots to the green, often finishing short or in trouble. As a result, I was shooting over my handicap more often than not.

I had a few lessons with my pro, to identify and fix any bad habits that I had developed. I also changed my clubs, treating myself to a TaylorMade RBZ Stage 2 driver and 3-wood, a set of Titleist AP1 irons, and some Vokey SM5 wedges.

I started using my scorecard to track which parts of my game were letting me

down. I began marking down whether I hit or missed the fairway and green, and how many putts I took on each hole. Once I'd done this for a few rounds, I started using YouTube lessons to give me things to work on on the practice ground in order to improve the weakest parts of my game.

I also changed my on-course strategy. One of the main things I changed was taking less club off certain tees in order to avoid danger, because I was focused on hitting more fairways. I also took more club into 75 per cent of greens in order to swing easier and with more control.

My new approach helped me put together a strong performance in the

Griffin Salver trophy, scoring a pair of 84s in a 36-hole competition, playing off a handicap of 16. Previously I would have really struggled to keep a score going for so long. By President's Day I was playing off 14 and was two-under after seven holes and finished with a gross 77 to win.

But my favourite moment last year was my first ever eagle, which came on a long par 4. I took more club than the old me would have done, made an easy swing and hit a pure shot over some trees and onto the green. To see the ball hit the green and roll up to the hole and drop in was a great reward for all the hard work I'd been putting in.





'Short game practice paid dividends'

Caroline Cronin, 15. Harrogate Golf Club, North Yorkshire. 36 to 13

I played my first full round of golf on holiday in Devon in August 2013 and absolutely loved it. When we got back, I joined Flaxby Golf Club and booked a few lessons. While I was having one of my first lessons, the Yorkshire Ladies County Golf Association were training on the range, and the coach approached me and suggested I join as she saw a lot of promise in my ability.

I carried on my coaching over the winter, both with my own coach and Yorkshire Girls. I have always enjoyed practising, and will happily work on my game throughout the whole year, in all weather. My only problem is that I can be something of a perfectionist,

sometimes trying too hard and taking it too seriously. Since becoming part of the Yorkshire Girls Under-14s team I've learnt to take a more relaxed approach, which has helped improve my golf and means I'm enjoying it even more than when I first started playing.

I work on all aspects of my game, but pay particular attention to my short game, as I find that the time I spend practising chipping and putting really pays dividends when it comes to my scores on the course.

My highlight so far has been dropping from 22.2 to 12.8 in a fortnight, just from playing in three competitions. I won the Jean Rudgard

Memorial Award, given to the Yorkshire Junior with the most improved handicap of the season.

Unfortunately, Flaxby has now closed down, so I have moved to Harrogate Golf Club where everyone has been very welcoming. My coach at Flaxby, Neil Moore, has been a great coach and incredibly supportive, but is sadly no longer coaching as he had to move on to another career after the closure.

I like to set myself challenges so there is always something to work towards. I want to at least cut my handicap by half this year and am hoping to apply for the Under-16 England Golf squad this autumn.

'My SkyPro is going to help me break the course record'

Jonny Pattenden, 22. Kirkbymoorside GC, North Yorks. 10.1 to 4.9

CUT!
5.2
SHOTS

I have been playing golf for 12 years now, but I've made a huge improvement in the last year or so. I think the main thing that has helped has been my improved attitude; I have matured as a person and as a golfer, and this has translated into better scores. I now take each hole as it comes, rather than getting ahead of myself and thinking about the holes to come and my overall score. I think that can ruin a round, if you're not 100 per cent focused on your next shot.

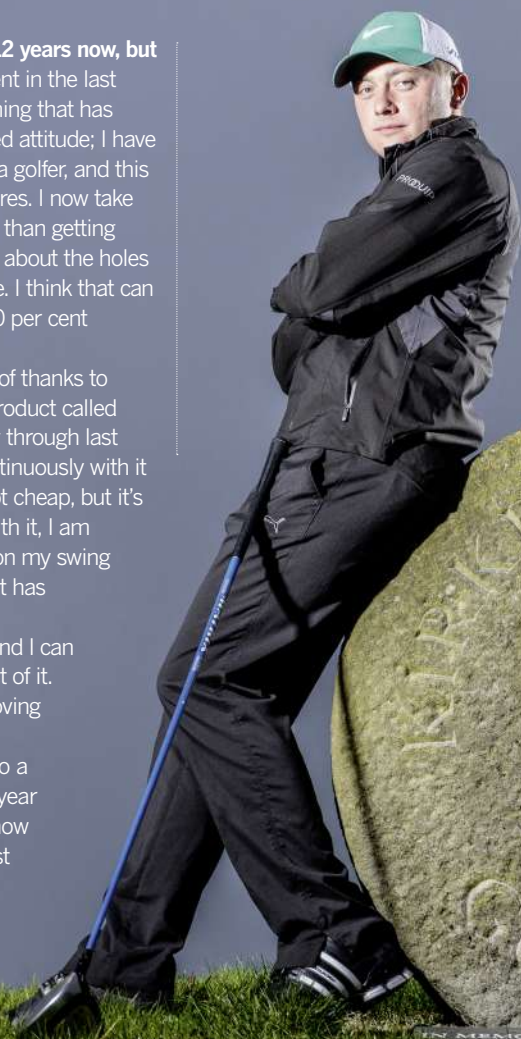
I also owe a huge amount of thanks to SkyCaddie for producing a product called SkyPro. I bought one halfway through last season and have worked continuously with it ever since. It was £180, so not cheap, but it's been so worth the money. With it, I am able to get instant feedback on my swing and where I'm going wrong. It has immensely improved my understanding of my swing and I can now break down every aspect of it. I genuinely feel like I'm improving week-by-week using it.

I am hoping to get down to a handicap of one or two this year – scratch would be great! I now represent my club in the East Riding League and find that

playing with better players is also really helping my game.

I am going to enter the Yorkshire Amateur this summer and would love to finish inside the top 25. I also want to break the Kirkbymoorside course record, which currently stands at 65 (four-under).

I posted a 67, 68, 70 and 71 last year, so I'm getting close. Obviously it is a very good score to beat, but I believe that I can do it.



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'My new warm-up saves me shots'

Ben Stanger, 32. East Horton Golf Club, Hampshire. 24 to 11

I played golf as a junior and young adult and got to a handicap of 18, but then got frustrated with the game and gave up about 12 years ago. I got back into it about a year ago and got a handicap of 24 at East Horton.

This time round, I feel much more focused and dedicated to playing, practising and improving. I used to just play, but now I work on my game on the range and practise putting properly. I haven't had any lessons, but have managed to learn everything I've needed via golf magazines, online videos, and the odd tip from the pro at my club.

One thing that has definitely improved my competition scores and

therefore my handicap is that I now always warm-up properly before heading to the first tee. Hitting balls on the range and stroking a good number of putts really helps loosen me up and gives me confidence.

I also have much better equipment now, which I think has made a big difference as the technology has come on so much. I replaced my old Titleist driver, TaylorMade Bubble Burner 3-wood and Mizuno T-Zoid irons with an SLDR driver, Titleist 915 3-wood and hybrid, TaylorMade RocketBladez irons and some Vokey SM5 wedges. I've also upgraded my old Ping putter to a Scotty Cameron. I've still got a couple of bits to buy, which I think will give me a perfect set that

should see me through a few years. I feel that getting my handicap down by 13 shots in a year has been a really big achievement, so when I have a bad hole, I remind myself how far I've come and that stops me letting one poor hole get the better of me. I'd really like to get down to single figures by the end of this summer, which I think should be achievable. I'm working on becoming more consistent from 100 yards and in as I think I could save quite a few shots per round.

CUT!
13
SHOTS



'I've learnt that a bogey is okay sometimes'

Oli Stanway, 18.
Kibworth Golf Club,
Leicestershire. 17 to 2.3

I started playing golf when I was 10, but didn't really play much and when I did it was always just for fun. About a year ago, I started taking it much more seriously and putting in the time on the practice ground. I was invited to join The Golf College which has given me access to some fantastic coaching, and I now feel that I can only keep getting better.

The biggest thing I've learnt is not to take on impossible shots. I used to be trying to make a birdie on every hole, or at least a par even if I was in serious trouble. This would sometimes lead to me hitting a low percentage shot, whereas I now take my medicine and have learnt to accept that sometimes a bogey is a good score. Taking a bogey now and then allows me to stay in the round, whereas in the past it might have ended up as a card-wrecker.

Last year was my best by a mile. I secured five gross victories across club competitions and junior opens around the county. I was also awarded some special achievement awards, including "Most Improved 1st year" at Golf College and "Presidents Putter" at my home club for overall outstanding performance. I also shot my first below-par round and represented the county.

I want to continue playing in as many competitions as possible, as these are what really test me both technically and mentally.



'Finding the right club to join changed me as a golfer'

Rob Taylor, 37. York Golf Club. 20 to 6.

I joined York Golf Club in December 2013 and quickly put three cards in just so I'd be eligible to play in competitions. I didn't know anyone, and was worried that I'd have to spend some time playing on my own, but everyone at the club was incredibly welcoming and I quickly got to know many of the members. One of them invited me to join a Facebook group called "Strenny Golfers".

The group was made up of around 50 York GC members and made it easy to find someone to play with, any time and any day of the week. The group included lots of low handicappers, which helped me massively as I was playing with quality golfers, learning from them and trying to keep up with them.

One of the biggest things I learnt was how important it is to find the fairway. I noticed that the good players I was playing with were hitting their second shot from the short grass more often than not, and realised that it was always going to be tough to score well

from in the rough – and even more so from the trees! The other thing I've managed to do is reduce the number of three-putts I have. I think spending time with good players has naturally helped the quality and tempo of my putting stroke, and I now have the confidence to give it a go if I'm standing over a four footer for par.

Being part of such a welcoming club has made me want to play and practise as much as possible, and the results in my golf have been clear. I won the

Strenny Golfers Order of Merit last year, which was a nice reward for some consistently strong performances across the whole season.

My aim now is to get my handicap as low as possible. I'd like to get to five by the end of this season and be a Category One golfer.



PRIZE DRAW

WIN BETTINARDI PUTTERS AND WEDGES

Exquisite milled faces are the hallmarks of these clubs



Prize package

Our two winners will have a choice between the Bettinardi Kuchar Model 1 and Model 2 putters, plus the wedges.

We've teamed up with specialist milled putter manufacturer Bettinardi Golf to offer two readers the chance to win the putter model used by PGA Tour star Matt Kuchar.

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One of the winners will also take home three Bettinardi H2 wedges and the other will put one of the wedges into action.

Designed by the seven-time PGA Tour winner alongside company founder Bob

Bettinardi, both the classy Kuchar Model 1 blade and halfmoon-shaped Model 2 putters have been specially-crafted from one piece of high-quality carbon steel by skilled engineers.

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www.bettinardi.co.uk

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To have a chance of winning either a Bettinardi Kuchar Model 1 or Model 2 putter, plus the new H2 wedges, simply log on to www.todaysgolfer.co.uk/win, click on the Bettinardi option and enter your email address. Entries close at midnight on May 13. Full terms can be found on the website.



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The new way to
Hit great



Short
Game
Special

wedges!

We combine strategy, technique and myth-busting to deliver you a more effective pitching game... and much lower scores

WORDS JAMES RIDYARD, WITH JOE DOWNES PICTURES HOWARD BOYLAN

The scoring zone. From around 100 yards and in the emphasis of the game turns suddenly and solely to skill. As amateurs, we can't power the ball as far as a tour pro... but the penalty for that fades as feel and control become the golfer's most prized assets.

No two short-game techniques are quite the same, and yet I see the same mistakes

among the vast majority of people I teach. These vary from club selection, set-up and posture to trajectory, swing path and tempo. We will tackle all of these in detail here.

Some of the solutions I present may seem out of the ordinary and go against some traditional methods that you will have been taught, but I urge you to try them. Great research has gone in to each one and my

theories received rave reviews from the likes of David Leadbetter, Chuck Cook and Jim Hardy when I presented them at the PGA of America's Teaching and Coaching Summit in January this year. When I received my invitation my aim was to produce ideas that were new, cool and practical. I believe I have done that and I know they will help to improve your wedge game. 🏌️



TG TOP 50

JAMES RIDYARD

CO-OWNER, SHORT GAME SECRETS GOLF SCHOOLS



Dividing his time between the US and his Bedford base, Ridyard was invited to speak at the PGA of America's Teaching & Coaching Summit in January. www.jamesridyardgolf.com

USE ONE WEDGE

The great Jack Nicklaus said that “95 per cent of Tour players play 95 per cent of their shots around their green with the same club.” We all have a favourite wedge in our bags, the one we always pick out and take to the range when we practise, yet when we get out on the course we try and hit different shots around the green with a range of clubs. Of course there are going to be times when you need to call on an alternative loft and bounce; however, by using your favourite wedge predominantly you will find that the consistency of your short game improves massively. Here's how to hit three different trajectories with one wedge.

PRACTISE AS YOU PLAY

To hit a low, mid and high-flighted shot, golfers traditionally hit a 7-iron, 9-iron and wedge. They hit the three shots from the same spot – just off their right heel – standing closer to the ball as the shaft shortens (below). But how often do you actually practise them? I would suggest that in the vast majority of cases golfers spend much more time practising these shots and others with their favourite wedge – and build a real feel for how that club performs.



You can use one wedge to create any trajectory. Lower the flight by moving the ball back in your stance and standing closer to it, making the shaft more vertical. To raise the flight, have the ball up, further away from you and open the face.

HIGH
SHOT

LOW
SHOT

CONTROL YOUR FINISH

As well as set-up, hitting these different shot types with one wedge is also about harnessing the followthrough. To do this you need to understand your swing arc, which is measured when the club is parallel to the ground. The further the club is from the ground and your body, the longer the swing arc is.

This is a long arc with the arms fully extended, hands at their maximum distance away from the body and shaft a long way from the ground. This will take spin off the ball and give you a lower trajectory.

With a touch of knee flex and wrist hinge, this middle arc will give you a little more flight and spin than the longer version.

This is a short arc, arms tucked close to the body and knee flex keeping the shaft low to the ground. Wrist hinge creates a shot that is likely to stop quickly due to land angle.



BRING THE BALL FORWARD

Having the ball back in your stance and your hands pressed forward is incredibly destructive. I see lots of people that struggle around the greens instantly put the ball back in their stance to try and cure it. However, this simply compounds the problem. The further back the ball goes, the more the shaft leans forward which makes the club sharper. This in turn makes the angle of attack steeper, making it almost impossible to consistently make a quality strike.

DON'T DIG IN

Having the ball on your back foot makes you more likely to dig the club into the ground as much of the loft and all of the bounce has been removed from the club.




A more central ball position allows the clubhead to move past the hands through impact, fully utilising the club's loft and bounce. Focus on keeping the butt of your club pointing at your navel to improve your striking.



HIT THE TOUR PITCH

Rory McIlroy said that hitting a lower trajectory with his wedges gives him better distance control and there is reasoning behind his assertion. A lower trajectory – between 25° and 35° – will, if created correctly, achieve a high spin rate that makes it more likely to take a single hop forward and then stop. This mid-launching shot is easier to control than high or low-launching shots that are exposed to greater variables.




Create your own 'trajectory gate' to hone your launch angle. To find the desired angle of around 30° , make a gate - use alignment sticks or something similar - two metres from the ball. The ball should pass through at around half that height - a metre or just over. Work on this to find the angle that gets the ball to hop-and-stop.

A mid-launch is easier to control than high or low shots where heightened spin, the wind or ground conditions increase the unpredictability. Imagine the trajectory you would use if you were throwing a ball to the flag.

IGNORE THE GROOVES

To hit a higher shot most amateurs open the face and then their body to a point where the face points back at the target. However, where the grooves are facing is not where the clubface is pointing. The only time that is the case is when the face is perfectly square. This means you don't need to open your body to hit higher shots; simply set up square.



Opening the face makes you do two things. Firstly, the heel of the club rises so you naturally lower the shaft. In turn, this makes the face point slightly to the left meaning that, if you open your stance, the face points further left leading to pulled shots and out-to-in swings in an attempt to steer the ball towards the target. On the opposite page I'll show you what I mean.

People like using the grooves as a reference point but, in truth it's impossible to tell exactly where the face is pointing when you lay it open. However, if you stand square and lower the shaft as you open the face, you will stay close to the target line.



OPEN STANCE

As well as causing issues with your swing path, opening your stance tends to move the ball position too far back. Many amateurs start square before turning left which transforms their alignment meaning the ball goes from a central position to too far back. This exaggerates shaft lean and negates the bounce on your wedge, increasing the likelihood of a poor strike.

When amateurs open the face of a wedge, their brain tells them the face is pointing right – so they aim left to bring the face back to 'square'. In reality, though it is only the grooves that were looking right; the face aim hasn't changed. So ignore the grooves, and trust your swing.

FACE

TARGET

CONTROL YOUR DISTANCE

Energy transfer is more important to distance control than swing speed or length. Most people try and control distance by swinging to specific points but this is useless if you can't control the transfer of energy from club to ball – smash factor. You need to keep the smash factor constant for all your wedge shots. Most pros do this without knowing it as they deliver the club so consistently. The only way to test yours is by using a launch monitor which I urge you to do with your local pro. The explanation here is designed to give you a good understanding of the concept before you go.

The ultimate smash factor is 1.0. If you can get your smash factor close to that it means club and ball are moving at the same speed. This explains why we're good at throwing the ball to the flag; hand and ball are moving at the same speed at the point of release.

Poor distance control is often the result of high smash factor. For every mph your club speed increases, ball speed increases at a higher rate, causing it to shoot further and further and costing control. It can be caused by lack of loft, poor striking or an in-to-out swing path.

Bad wedge shots put too much energy into the golf ball. You can take it out by cutting across the ball, having the face open to the path, increasing loft or changing ball position. Consistency of club delivery is vital.



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Short
Game
Special

WEDGES TESTED

The technology and design of 14 of the latest models put through their paces on the course and a launch monitor. So which models will come out on top?

WORDS DUNCAN LENNARD PICTURES TOM CRITCHELL, ANGUS MURRAY



Today's **Golfer** **THE TEST**

Where tech and feel meet

A good wedge is a blend of technology and the touchy-feely stuff; it has to inspire confidence through its design and feel, and it has to perform with consistency in crucial parameters like flight, spin and distance control. Our testing protocols reflect that. Fourteen wedges were tested by resident gear expert James Ridyard, acting gear editor Duncan Lennard and two mid-handicap club players. Their views were blended with factual performance data from TrackMan to create a ranking for each. The results will help you make the right choice when the time comes to upgrade your wedge set.

Our panel of testers



James Ridyard

Handicap: Pro

Current wedges:

Titleist Vokey SM5



Duncan Lennard

Handicap: 7

Current wedges:

TaylorMade TP



Jon Bolger

Handicap: 11

Current wedges:

Titleist Vokey SM4



Andy Wosket

Handicap: 11

Current wedges:

Cobra Trusty Rusty

Our test ratings

Gold, Silver and Bronze gongs were joined by a 'best on test' award.



Recognition
in one area of
performance



Bronze Award:
Overall ranking
of 8.5



Silver Award:
Overall ranking
of 9



Gold Award:
Overall ranking
of 9.5 or above





Flight tracker

All wedges were tested in a Belfry fitting suite.



Having a blast

Andy Wosket trials a 56° option.



Sole sisters

Sole grind influences versatility.



Thick and thin

Clubs were tested from a range of lies.

The Belfry

Where we tested

The Belfry Hotel & Resort is steeped in golfing history and provides the perfect getaway for any golf break, with the three stunning golf courses accompanied by the luxurious hotel, fine dining experiences and state-of-the-art leisure facilities.

The PGA National Golf Academy offers expert tuition for golfers of all levels and aligns with the renowned Golf Shop on site to allow golfers to be custom-fit for the latest products from leading brands in the dedicated custom-fitting suites.

● Visit www.TheBelfry.com or call 01675 470256 for information.

How we tested 14 wedges

All 14 wedges in the test were rated in five categories, and given a mark out of 10 for each.

● For the first three – the more subjective areas of Looks, Feel and Perceived Versatility, TG clubfitting expert and PGA pro James Ridyard was joined by TG equipment editor Duncan Lennard and readers Jon Bolger and Andy Wosket. All testers hit each loft from a variety of lies and situations – the 60° for lobs and pitches, the 56° for bunker shots and the 52° for chip shots. Wedges are arguably only behind putters in being a personal choice, but their thoughts will help you form your own view.

● For the second two – the more techy categories of Gapping and Spin Retention – we used TrackMan to collect data in two crucial areas.

A good set of wedges should supply you with even distances through the lofts, and our Gapping mark was designed to assess this. Manufacturers submitted a 52°, 56° and 60° option. Ideally, the typical 56° distance will bisect those created

by the 52° and 60°. Each loft of each brand was hit repeatedly by PGA pro James to a tolerance of 1mph clubhead speed with quality of strike – TrackMan's smash factor rating – taken into account. A benchmark distance was established for each loft. The closer the 56° got to splitting the 52° and 60° distances, the higher mark they achieved.

Spin Retention is an assessment of how well each wedge spins the ball from longer grass. The 2010 groove rule change came about because wedges were doing this too well, and so reducing the benefit of hitting the fairway. Much of the technology on test is the result of the brands' R&D into raising spin rates legally, and



Your choice
Looks and feel
are important.

recouping some of these losses.

The 56° wedge of each brand was struck from a mat with a dry ball, with only shots within three yards of a 50-yard carry counting. The results created an average spin rate. The same process was then repeated from two-inch rough, creating a second average. This score, as a percentage of the first, represented spin retention. The higher the percentage, the better the score.

● Each wedge set, then, earned a total mark out of 50 based on the five 10pt categories. This was averaged to give the club its final mark out of 10.

Who took part

We invited all major manufacturers to submit one set of wedges for the test, in lofts of 52°, 56° and 60°. These were in standard lengths, with medium bounce and the sole grinds that come as standard with the set – though alternative grinds were also supplied where the manufacturers felt appropriate to give each tester a fuller understanding of the options open to him.



Progen Chromo

£59.99

Lofts: 52°, 56°, 60°

Tech: Offers versatility through a dual-bounce sole, raised slightly along the front and back. Forged from 304 steel. Heel-toe weighting adds forgiveness. Chrome finish gives durability.

James Ridyard

There's very aggressive milling on the face; it's extremely sharp, wide and deep, almost like a face full of grooves. This gave me some inconsistent spin. It feels light, the shaft and head not brilliantly balanced.

Duncan Lennard

Not the most friendly sole. The head is a decent shape but the leading edge appears quite sharp – any forward shaft lean and it gets tight to the ground. Better off firm turf.

Jon Bolger

I got too much spin on chip-and-runs; the ball grabbed when I didn't want it to. Impact felt a bit thick and dull. Good club if you want lots of zip, though I suspect they might chew balls up.

Andy Wosket

Chrome finish could be an issue in bright sun but I like the sole shape and to me the feel was good, possibly helped by the plastic insert. The thicker top edge gave me a little more confidence.

- ✅ High spin good for longer pitches.
- ❌ Inconsistent spin rates and dull feel.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 6.5 Feel/Sound: 6.5
Versatility: 6.5 Gapping: 6
Spin retention: 7

6.5

Web: www.progengolf.co.uk



MD Golf Superstrong

£60

Lofts: 48°, 50°, 52°, 54°, 56°, 58°, 60°

Tech: Razor grooves are designed to maximise spin. Gunmetal finish reduces glare. Precision Rifle shaft and Multi-compound grip as standard.

James Ridyard

The sole sits quite flat and its grind is not that dynamic, with not much camber to it – it would probably suit the guys who like to pick it fairly cleanly. The face milling is fairly deep and I felt it really gripped the ball – confirmed by some quite low launches.

Duncan Lennard

Clean, unfussy head shape with a relatively straight leading edge, which encouraged me to square it up. Strikes felt solid, though a relatively narrow sole limits its versatility.

Jon Bolger

I didn't find the grips very comfortable, thought them a bit thin. I got limited feedback off the face and little grip. I didn't feel I could control them very well, and they didn't give me lot of confidence.

Andy Wosket

A fine, compact-looking club which to me felt quite light and responsive. Arguably a bit big in the toe but solid sound and feel.

- ✅ Classy head shape and excellent value.
- ❌ No colour options, limited face feedback.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 7.5 Feel/Sound: 7
Versatility: 6.5 Gapping: 7
Spin retention: 8

7

Web: www.mdgolf.co.uk



Yonex WS-2

£69 (s), £79 (g)

Lofts: 52°, 56°, 60° (steel and graphite)

Tech: A thickish top line moves the CG up the face, helping control ball flight. Head is cast from mild 8620 carbon steel. Milled grooves help generate spin.

James Ridyard

Quite a round face with a leading edge more curved than some. It makes the middle of the leading edge look a long way forwards, which isn't to everyone's taste. The lie feels upright, not great with a wedge as it will cause the heel to dig.

Duncan Lennard

Weight has been scooped horizontally from a central channel, apparently moving more weight low and high. It seems to help on strikes low in the face. Graphite a good option if you already have it in your irons.

Jon Bolger

The graphite-shafted version is very light and takes some getting used to, though it does encourage you to accelerate – something that could help people who are a bit handsy or not confident.

Andy Wosket

With the graphite I struggled to feel the head – though I scored well with it. Nice looking, and for me very forgiving – even on less good strikes the ball did quite well.

- ✅ High levels of spin, sensible price point.
- ❌ Light graphite version an acquired taste.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 7 Feel/Sound: 7.5
Versatility: 7.5 Gapping: 7
Spin retention: 8

7.5

Web: www.yonex.co.uk



Wilson Staff FG Tour

£79

Lofts: 48-64°

Tech: Employs 11 lasered 'spin enhancers' between each Y-groove to increase spin. Standard sole built for medium/steep attack, Tour grind helps versatility. Lamkin grip pattern aids consistent gripping down.

James Ridyard

This wedge has a very square leading edge and quite a compact, shallow head, all of which I like. A well-designed head with some nice chamfered edges, and a fairly versatile grind. Good performer.

Duncan Lennard

The face gripped the ball well, and is almost three colours; it'll be a bit busy for some, but I liked the way it made the grooves stand out. Didn't enjoy opening the face up on the standard sole, possibly due to the uniform sole width. Tour grind option gives more versatility.

Jon Bolger

Looks fine, but for me the feel was more clunky than crisp, with not much feedback. It sits well behind the ball, though the 60 looks more lofted, more like a 64.

Andy Wosket

The club sits nice and square, and the ball comes nicely off the face. I felt I got a good blend of spin and run-out.

- ✅ Neat, compact head, plenty of spin.
- ❌ Feel and versatility not as good as some.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 7.5 Feel/Sound: 6.5
Versatility: 7.5 Gapping: 9
Spin retention: 7.5

7.5

Web: www.wilsonstaff.com



Ping Glide

£105 (s), £120 (g)

Lofts: 47°-60° (standard-width sole)

Tech: Three sole widths/grinds. Gorge grooves (47-54°) aid full shot performance, tighter grooves (56-60°) promote spin on part shots. CFS shaft designed for stable feel and lower flight.

James Ridyard

It was immediately noticeable how far off the ground the leading edge sat, even on the mid-bounce standard-width sole. So it wasn't the most confidence-inspiring from tight lies. However strikes felt solid, the flight was consistent and it's good-looking in the satiny finish.

Duncan Lennard

Though not my favourite looker the club performed very well, producing consistent flight and spin. For some reason felt a little heavier than some, though swing weights are comparable.

Jon Bolger

Not a fan of the looks or the feel: the head looks very big and I didn't massively enjoy the sound off the face. Didn't inspire me.

Andy Wosket

The face to me looks big in the toe and more lofted than they are, which I guess is related. I didn't get on with the sound, and it felt one of the heavier wedges on test.

- ✅ One of the most consistent performers.
- ❌ Shape and sound struggled to win favour.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 7 Feel/Sound: 8
Versatility: 7.5 Gapping: 9.5
Spin retention: 7.5

8

Web: www.ping.com



Cobra Tour Trusty

£89

Lofts: 48°-64°

Tech: K-Grind sole sculpted to promote performance on all distances. Variable Feed Rate milling creates the ideal face surface texture for spin, enhanced by grooves 15% bigger than the old model.

James Ridyard

There's nothing not to like about the simple and clean head shape. It gives a decent feel and sound, and one of the most consistent TrackMan performers.

Duncan Lennard

This is a wedge built more for playability than forgiveness, and it shows: heel-toe relief means you can open the face without the leading edge lifting, but it demands accurate striking on tighter lies. Good feel and frames the ball well at set-up.

Jon Bolger

The 60° looked more lofted, which threw me until I found the bounce. I enjoyed the performance, though I don't see the point of the cut-out bit at the back; it looks like I've chipped my club.

Andy Wosket

I already use Cobra because they're well balanced, sit well and I like the compact head and straighter leading edge. To me, it's like an older-style wedge.

- ✅ Consistent performance, good versatility.
- ❌ Not that forgiving, PVD finish wears fast.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 7.5 Feel/Sound: 7.5
Versatility: 7.5 Gapping: 9
Spin retention: 8.5

8

Web: www.cobragolf.co.uk



John Letters MM Grind £99.99

Lofts: 52°, 56°, 60°

Tech: Forged from carbon steel. Aims to boost spin through two extra CNC grooves and True Temper's DG Spinner shaft. Sole grind created for Tour versatility.

James Ridyard

The MM Grind has a sharp, square leading edge with a grind that has the front middle section really flat. It's extremely good off firm, tight lies, though I wouldn't fancy it off lush fairways. Impact sound is fairly muted. Overall a nicely executed club.

Duncan Lennard

Another wedge built for the more accomplished short game, and it delivers impressively with its tight leading edge, good versatility and sweet feel.

Jon Bolger

I was really impressed with this club. It sits lovely, the ball came off the face nice and the 60° was probably my best performer on test. I didn't think it was the most spinny, but it felt traditional, solid and well-made. I'd be happy to put these in the bag.

Andy Wosket

The Spinner shaft is designed to work like a hinge under the grip, increasing attack angle and spin; on longer pitches you can feel it working. Felt a little upright to me.

✅ Clean, classic looks and impressive feel.

❌ Let down only by indifferent gapping.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 8.5 Feel/sound: 8.5
Versatility: 8 Gapping: 6.5
Spin retention: 8

Web: www.johnletters.com

8

CLUBFACE WEAR

How performance drops off with use

Tests show a 45% spin drop in one year

While many of us can get a bit fatigued by the constant urging to buy new gear, wedges could be a bit different. These clubs, packed with face technology to help us control the ball, are also the most used... in play and practice. Tour pros need new wedges every three months or so. With club players it's not so extreme, but TG's research into how wear affects performance still makes for sober reading.

We took two identical wedges, one brand new and the other battle-scarred from 12 months' use. Both were tested with club speeds of 55mph plus or minus 1mph. The average results are below.

New face	Year-old face
Launch 26°	Launch 35°
Spin 8116rpm	Spin 4435rpm
Carry 74yds	Carry 75yds

After a year, the clubface produced just 55% of its original spin. As a consequence, with face friction reduced it also launched the ball considerably higher. While the total carry may have been similar, that lower spin would have produced much more runout.

Obviously wedge wear depends on use, and this year-old wedge had seen more than its share of practice sessions. TaylorMade's nickel cobalt face plate in their new EF Spin Groove wedge (see p114) is designed to slow this groove blunting. But ultimately, this considerable drop in performance leaves you with three options: buy a new wedge every year to 18 months, ask your local pro about a club regrooving service, or persevere with what you have and allow for more run.

Or you could adopt Padraig Harrington's tactic of having two identical wedges, practising with one and playing with the other.



Fresh faced
A new face means lower launch and more spin.



Mizuno MP-T5

£109.99

Lofts: 49°-62°

Tech: Grain flow forged wedge. Loft-specific grooves see Quad Cut in the 54-62 to help spin on part shots. Precisely milled face and improved teardrop profile. Two bounce options from 54°-62°, both with appropriate sole grinds.

James Ridyard

The high point of the bounce is towards the back of the sole, helping you get the leading edge tighter to the ground. Launched mid to low which means there's plenty of friction between ball and club.

Duncan Lennard

The T5 has a squarer leading edge with just a slight curve, which I like. White satin finish looks clean and classy while muting sun glare. Both sole grinds permit plenty of greenside flexibility.

Jon Bolger

I found this wedge versatile and it felt good through the turf, but the head looked big to me, almost like a beginner's club, and it didn't give as much confidence as some.

Andy Wosket

The club felt well balanced and the face responsive. Even when square the bounce just sits up, giving a bit more forgiveness. Overall, one I'd buy.

- ✚ Blends workability and forgiveness.
- ✚ While consistent, failed to inspire.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 7.5 Feel/Sound: 8
Versatility: 8.5 Gapping: 8.5
Spin retention: 8

Web: golf.mizuno-europe.com

8



Callaway Mack Daddy 2

£99

Lofts: 52°, 54°, 56°, 58°, 60°

Tech: Tour grind offers heel/toe relief and a straighter leading edge. 39% larger grooves create 25% more spin out of rough.

James Ridyard

I found this wedge very versatile, the result of an aggressively ground and well-designed sole that makes it easy to add or reduce bounce. There's plenty of heel and toe relief too for opening and closing the face. Nice club.

Duncan Lennard

There's a lot going on between the grooves, and it felt quite easy to hit a low, spinny one. Solid feel, and the ball flight felt fairly consistent.

Jon Bolger

A clean profile gives you confidence over the ball. The 60 felt responsive and I felt I could play a range of shots. The 52 took a little more getting used to for me, but overall I'd be happy to put that in my bag.

Andy Wosket

Not as forgiving as some for me, but a lovely classic looking wedge with a nice grip. No complaints about the feel, and with the 52 the ball checked consistently on the second bounce.

- ✚ T-Grind sole affords excellent versatility.
- ✚ Not as many loft options as some rivals.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 8 Feel/Sound: 7
Versatility: 8.5 Gapping: 8
Spin retention: 9

Web: www.callawaygolf.com

8



TaylorMade R Series EF

£119

Lofts: 47°, 50°, 52°, 54°, 56°, 58°, 60°

Tech: Nickel cobalt face plate increases spin and keeps the grooves sharper for longer. Soft feel through carbon steel construction. ATV sole permits effective strikes from all lies; Classic grind offers more loft options.

James Ridyard

The classy finish reminds me of the old oil can finish on Scotty Cameron putters. The KBS wedge shaft is more counterbalanced so the head feels lighter, which makes it especially good on finesse shots where you want the hands overtaking the clubhead.

Duncan Lennard

A really good-looking club with a quite compact head. For me, it hit a good blend of workability and forgiveness, and performed well from sand.

Jon Bolger

This looks nice, felt relatively heavy. I found it a solid performer but it didn't quite have the feel or feedback as some others on test. It hasn't flicked the switch for me.

Andy Wosket

Felt very responsive and the sound had that crispness I look for in a wedge. I found it easy to play a range of greenside shots.

- ✚ Very good rough spin retention.
- ✚ Mid-spin KBS Wedge shaft won't suit everyone.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 7.5 Feel/Sound: 7.5
Versatility: 7.5 Gapping: 9
Spin retention: 9.5

Web: www.taylormadegolf.com

8



H2 stands for High Helix, a high-speed milling process designed to enhance performance and spin rates from long and short grass.

Bettinardi H2

£130

Lofts: 52°, 54°, 56°, 58°, 60°

Golfer

BRONZE

Tech: Special face-milling improves traction in wet and dry. C-grind sole lets you open the face without the leading edge rising. Armed with KBS's mid-launch, high-spin Hi-Rev shaft.

James Ridyard

This is a really nice design with a classic neat head. The grooved area seems biased towards the heel, with space on the toe; the CG might be there, and that's fine. The grind is versatile and usable; overall, a really nicely balanced club.

Duncan Lennard

Another club using a KBS wedge shaft, and it works beautifully with the weighting of the clubhead. It gives high levels of face awareness, helping me strike with authority.

Jon Bolger

I think these are the best wedges I've ever hit. They gave me a lovely blend of check and run-out, and the feel is so crisp. They sit well and feel perfectly weighted. I think you could get consistent with these very quickly. They're expensive, but I'd pay it.

Any Wosket

One stunning wedge. The feel, the looks, the results, all were right up there for me. Gave me the most confidence of all the wedges I tested.

- ✚ Buttery feel, good spin, gorgeous looks.
- ✚ Ordinary spin retention and pricey.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 9.5 Feel/Sound: 9
Versatility: 8 Gapping: 8.5
Spin retention: 7.5

Web: www.bettinardi.co.uk

8.5



The face of the Engage promotes a grippy connection with the ball through the brand's X3X grooves and precision milling.

Nike Engage

£99.99

Lofts: 50°-60° (square sole)

Golfer

BRONZE

Tech: Three distinctive sole grinds. Toe Sweep has a narrow heel to resist rough snagging, Square Sole is for golfers who prefer to keep the blade square, while Dual Sole offers versatility.

James Ridyard

The leading edge is quite square with a small camber, which I like. The ball launched fairly low with high spin. The bounce is forward on the sole, which makes it effective in most turf conditions.

Duncan Lennard

The head shape may look a little futuristic, but it's all at the back; when you look down at set-up all you see is a clean, compact face. Once you get past that, the playability is impressive.

Jon Bolger

I thought the design looked like a club from a toy set, but this wedge was sweet as a nut. The ball stopped very quickly, and there's huge amounts you can do with them. The feel was soft, the strike crisp. Very impressed.

Andy Wosket

An unusual design for sure but I really liked them. You could really feel the ball on the face, and there was nice check on the second bounce.

- ✚ Crisp strike and strong feedback.
- ✚ Head shape and cosmetics are an acquired taste.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 7 Feel/Sound: 8.5
Versatility: 9 Gapping: 8.5
Spin retention: 9

Web: www.nikegolf.com

8.5

Cleveland 588 RTX 2.0 £99

Lofts: 46°-64° **Grinds:** Three (blade and cavity options) **Finishes:** Tour Satin, Black Satin



Tech: Sharper grooves and a new micro-milled face pattern see surface roughness nudge legal limits. Three sole grinds with three-dot, consistent sole-width version offering most bounce and the versatile one-dot the least. Cavity-back and muscle-back options. Lofts 46°-64°.

James Ridyard

One of the bigger heads on test, with the leading edge looking almost a little onset – not something you see that often. But the face launched the ball at a good angle with each loft option, and stopped it quickly.

Duncan Lennard

The ball seemed to grip the face for a fraction longer than the rest. Quite simply a quality wedge that gives a feeling of consistency and confidence.

Jon Bolger

A wedge that feels very well made and well balanced. Nice grips, not too heavy, and it gave that lovely crisp noise and nice blend of check and run-out. Very, very impressive clubs. I think any golfer would get on very well with these.

Andy Wosket

The best performer on test for me.

Really smart clubs that felt and sounded really sweet. They sit very nicely, giving me the feeling I could open it without it drop-kicking or square it up without it digging in.

- Strong and consistent spin generation.
- Leading edge may look a little forward to some.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 8.5 Feel/Sound: 9
Versatility: 9 Gapping: 9
Spin retention: 8

9

Web: www.clevelandgolf.com



Titleist Vokey SM5 £105

Lofts: From 46°-62° **Grind options:** Six **Finishes:** Tour chrome, Gold Nickel, Raw Black

Golfer
GOLD

Tech: Deeper TX3 grooves improve contact while quality milling raises spin and consistency. Six sole grinds and bounce options from 4°-14° ensure your short-game style and any ground condition you can play in is catered for. Loft options from 46°-62°.

James Ridyard

The M grind has a nice camber on the sole with bounce two-thirds of the way back, making it quite versatile. A slightly softer and lighter wedge flex shaft gets the head kicking forwards. A package of feel, versatility and consistency makes the SM5 my wedge of choice.

Duncan Lennard

When you pick this wedge up, your hands feel directly connected to the clubface. That's an instant confidence booster, enhanced by the neat, compact look, a responsive feel and flight consistency. Grind choice offers great customising options, but it's important to choose the right one for your game.

Jon Bolger

I already use Vokey SM4. To be honest I didn't feel a huge difference between the two, possibly a little more spin. But that's no bad thing; these are classic wedges which perform in all conditions.

Andy Wosket

Feel and balance are excellent and I felt I had more control on the lob wedge, a club that can cause me problems. They sit well and gave me a nice mid-flight.

✚ Great rough spin retention, M grind offers decent versatility.

✚ Six grind options can confuse.

THE VERDICT

Looks: 9 Feel/Sound: 9.5
Versatility: 9.5 Gapping: 9
Spin retention: 9.5

9.5

Web: www.vokey.com

Wide choice
Sole width, camber and bounce are engineered to give six options to cover a range of attack angles and turf firmness.



The right lines
Precision face-milling and deep TX3 grooves work together to boost spin rates and grip from both the short and long grass.



Four things we learned

The truth about wet golf balls and dark clubheads

1 Dark heads look smaller

You can buy most of the wedges on test in a range of finishes, with many offering a lighter and a darker look – for example Cleveland make both a Tour and Black Satin option in the 588 RTX 2.0. Testers frequently commented on how the darker version made the head look more compact, even though the dimensions were identical. This is worth taking into account when making your choice.

2 The wet ball effect

In the ideal wedge contact, a dry face meets a dry ball. This allows the face milling to apply maximum friction to the ball, sending it out relatively low and packed with spin. During TrackMan testing we aimed for such dry impacts, but the occasional wet ball inevitably got through. When this happens, less friction is possible; the ball simply runs up the face, producing much lower spin and launching

higher. We discounted those shots. Modern designs limit this effect, but on wet days make sure you allow for it.

3 Don't ignore the shaft

The 2010 groove rule change – and consequent drop in wedge spin – led to an increased focus on wedge-specific shafts. Testing shows shaft bend profiles can have a significant impact on lifting or calming spin rates; KBS's Wedge shaft for example moderates spin while their Hi-Rev raises it – as does True Temper's DG Spinner. Understanding whether you need your

wedge spin rates raised or lowered is key to using your best shaft.

4 High spin isn't necessarily good

With all the fuss made about spin creation, it's quite easy to form a belief that the higher the spin rate, the better the club. It's not the case. On a couple of occasions our testers found wedges too spinny, the ball checking on shots they felt should run out. Very high spin is also no good without consistency; our top scorers didn't always produce the most rpm, but their spin rates were remarkably steady.

The key TrackMan statistics

● 2010's groove rule change outlawed the sharper-edged U-shaped grooves that were deemed to improve spin performance from rough. Ever since, wedge engineers have been seeking legal ways to recoup that lost performance.

They've broadly focused on two areas – face roughness, created by advanced milling techniques, and groove edge and size technology.

● While face milling dictates the majority of spin creation from a clean, dry lie, it's groove

technology that gets to work in the rough. The grooves' main function is not so much to create spin as to trap the moisture and dirt you get in longer grass, helping the milled face do its job.

● Spin retention from rough,

then, is a key part of a wedge's design – and below, we can see how the 14 clubs on test fared. Note that the ball's launch angle rises as spin rate drops – a direct consequence of the loss of friction between clubface and ball.

Wedges	50-yard range mat, 56°		50-yard two-inch rough, 56°		Spin retention
	Spin (rpm)	Launch angle	Spin (rpm)	Launch angle	
Progen Chromo	8369	22°	2500	36°	32%
MD Golf Superstrong	7802	28°	3071	36°	39%
Yonex WS-2	8910	25°	2900	38°	39%
Wilson Staff FG Tour	7899	25°	2900	36°	37%
Ping Glide	6966	30°	2600	37°	37%
Cobra Tour Trusty	7526	24°	3200	36°	43%
John Letters MM Grind	7463	25°	2990	36°	40%
Mizuno MP-T5	7752	25°	3200	36°	41%
Callaway Mack Daddy 2	7299	25°	3800	36°	47%
TaylorMade R Series EF	7658	27°	4100	32°	53%
Bettinardi H2	7480	23°	2800	35°	37%
Nike Engage	7642	28°	3376	35°	47%
Cleveland 588 RTX 2.0	8440	28°	3376	35°	40%
Titleist Vokey SM5	8073	23°	4380	36°	54%

Rough diamonds

Spin performance in longer grass is a key part of modern wedge design.





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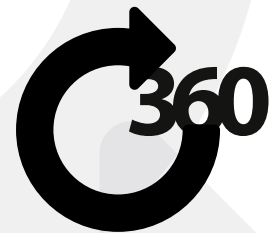
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SHOOT LOWER SCORES!

World No.3 Henrik Stenson shows you
how to smarten up your scorecard
without spending hours on the range

WORDS HENRIK STENSON
PICTURES FAROOQ SALIK

When people tell me I hit 89 per cent of fairways and 94 per cent of greens in regulation the year I won my first Race to Dubai title in 2013, I'm still astonished by those stats. I only missed four out of 72 greens that week, and on one of those occasions my ball was plugged in the fairway, so you could say my long game was in good order! It goes without saying that when I won the FedEx Cup and Race to Dubai double-double that year, my ball striking was extremely solid. It was the same when I won the Players at Sawgrass in 2009 and at the Omega Dubai Desert Classic in 2007. I'm not the best putter on tour, but when I'm on from tee to green, I can win a tournament with average putting stats. That's rare though. A lot of my focus for the 2015 season has been to improve my putting.

So how can you score better this year? There are days when you'll hit it great and days when you'll feel like you have no idea where the next shot is going – that's golf.

But there are areas of your game that you can sharpen up that will bring your scores tumbling down regardless. With a more reliable chipping technique, a better approach on the greens and a smarter on course strategy, you'll turn net 75s into net 70s.

Turn over to find out how.



NIP IT OFF THOSE TIGHT LIES

It's not easy to chip from the close-cropped grass around the green, but here's a very reliable method you can use

In my mind, Bermuda grass is the trickiest surface to chip off, but you find a lot of it in American and the Middle East so you need to learn the best technique. In Europe, that technique works on those tight lies you often find around the green. A lot of amateurs get their hands well forward at address with plenty of shaft lean. If you catch the ball first, you can get a decent result – but there's always a tendency for the leading edge to dig in, which either causes duffs or trappy chips that race way past the target.

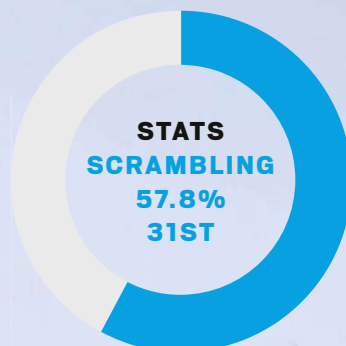
'Stand the shaft upright and move closer to the ball'

One of my favourite methods for chipping consistently off tight lies is to stand much closer to the ball and get the shaft standing more upright at address. I turn the toe in a little and with a feeling of pretty dead hands, I try to clip the ball on the toe. Because the clubhead is standing up slightly, the grass doesn't have a chance to grab it on the way through. You're not going to get loads of spin playing it this way, but if you're looking for solid, reliable contact on a basic chip where you have some green to work with, this is a great technique to use.



STAND THE HEEL UP

Look how tight I am to the ball in this sequence. My shaft at address is stood up so the heel of the wedge is slightly off the ground. From here, it's much easier to nip the ball cleanly off the turf.



Don't pull the trigger until you believe in what you're about to do. I pick a small target – as the old saying goes, aim small, miss small – and once I've got it, I don't need to take a second look.

PITCHING TO WIN

When you think of Henrik Stenson's game, the first thing that springs to mind is imperious ball-striking. Maybe the best example of this is that 3-wood he hit on the final hole of the 2013 DP World Tour Championship that finished just inches from the cup. But the Swede has been just as deadly from inside 100 yards as well in closing out

tournaments, a range not renowned as a strength of his game. He sealed the deal just a few months ago in Dubai (below) with a wedge to five feet on the 18th hole.

It may be the spectacular 3-wood shots that stand out in the memory, but it's this scoring range where the top players earn their money. Sharpening this area of your own game is your best route to lower scores in 2015.

For all shots around the green, it's about playing them in a way that gives you most margin for error. You'd rather have an 8-foot putt for par every single time than one putt of five feet and another of 30 feet.



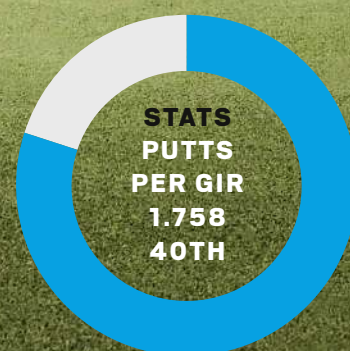
AVOID EXCESS ROTATION IN YOUR STROKE

My putting coach Phil Kenyon and I have been working to eliminate a reliance on timing my release

I've started working on my putting with (TG Top 50 coach) Phil Kenyon again. I saw Phil around the time of last year's PGA [Stenson finished in a tie for third] and have been doing some work since then. First off, we took the data on my stroke using a few different tools like the SAM Putt Lab. I've always tended to have a bit too much rotation in my stroke, which brings the timing factor of my release into it too much. So I'm working on eliminating the rotation by feeling that when I take the putter back, the face is pointing a little bit stronger towards the ball and the target. If that toe rotates away from the ball too much, at some point it has to come back and you find yourself changing the club path to accommodate it.

Something simple that I do a lot and would recommend to any amateur is to regularly check how I'm aiming the putter.

I see a lot of golfers who just wander up to the ball, glancing at the hole and hitting it with nowhere near enough attention paid to lining the putter face up correctly. You can have the best stroke in the world, but if your aim is two balls outside the cup on a straight putt, you won't hole a single one.



THE QUICKEST WAY TO REALLY IMPROVE

Spend a bit of time practising your green reading, alignment and pace control and you will knock shots off your scores

Even tour pros sometimes struggle to read greens consistently. There are always subtle changes to the grass and the grain that mean you can have a week where you just don't see the lines as well. How you approach it mentally is a big part of it. When I look back at a good putting week, I usually had more clarity of thought, made firm decisions and stuck to them. When my green reading is on, I feel extremely comfortable on the greens. I'm not worried or second guessing myself. When you're putting poorly, it's usually because you're making poor reads that in turn lead to questioning your stroke. If I had to take five shots off an 18-handicapper's score as quickly as possible, I wouldn't even look at their swing. Amateurs make so many mistakes on the greens, with reading, pace and alignment, that it's really worth putting the time in to sharpen this area. It's very hard for an average golfer to shave five shots off their long game, but on and around the greens, you could do it with a couple of months of focused practice.

'Aim well and you can create a pure stroke that has no need for manipulation'

I used to have an issue where my right arm would come out a bit, while my left elbow was tucked in. Now I really try to align my arms in my set-up.

A good way to check if your arms are aligned is to place a cane or shaft across your forearms (flex your elbows a little more to hold it there).



HENRIK STENSON

PLAY A SMARTER GAME ALL THE TIME

Bad decisions are a bigger source of dropped shots than any one poor swing. Here's how to avoid making them

What are the most common mistakes I see amateurs make in pro-ams? The No.1 error would have to be decision-making.

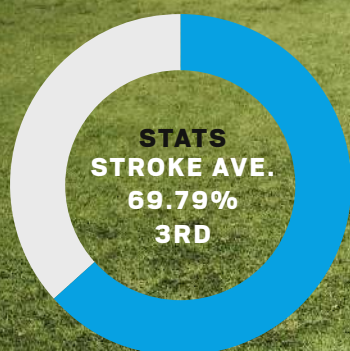
There's a temptation to think that because you're not entirely sure where the ball is going to go, it doesn't matter what club you take off the tee. But you've got to get into the habit of making smart, strategic decisions.

Just as crucial is club choice when it comes to hitting into greens. Amateurs tend to select the right club for their best possible strike. Faced with a 160-yard shot where their very best 7-iron goes 160, but their average might only be 150, they'll take a 7. Nine times out of 10, you'll come up short and the way most golf courses are set up, most of the

'Set yourself the target of keeping double-bogeys off your card'

trouble is in front of the green, not behind it. If in doubt or in between, take a longer club.

The easiest way for you to improve your score right away is to play a smarter game, especially when in trouble. If your handicap is 18 or below, set out with the mindset of keeping anything worse than a double bogey off your card. It's not easy to accomplish, but if you look at the vast majority of scores worse than bogey, a mental error of some sort is usually to blame. Learn to play with high margins of error in every department of your game, but particularly the short game. I mentioned chipping earlier, but the same applies to pitching. If you've got a 90-yard shot, instead of going at it like a mad axe-man with a 58-degree wedge, take a pitching wedge, grip down and make a nice, smooth three-quarter swing. Remember, even if you're a good player, you don't always have to go for it.





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'Dragon's Den
is nothing
compared to
standing on
the first tee at
St Andrews!'

MY LIFE IN GOLF

Peter Jones

The 'Dragon' on hitting it miles, getting down to scratch and missing a two-inch putt

WORDS KEVIN BROWN PICTURES JAMES CHEADLE, BBC

Peter Jones is a giant of a man in every sense. Standing over 6ft 7ins, the star of popular BBC TV show *Dragon's Den* has emerged from humble beginnings to become a self-made multi-millionaire with an estimated worth of £475m.

Nowadays the 49-year-old has a lot of fingers in a lot of pies with interests in a wide range of companies and a variety of markets that collectively generate sales of more than £250m and employ more than 1,000 people. Awarded a CBE in 2009, Jones always knew he had what it takes, saying: "I wanted to do the best I could, knowing that one day I was going to be a multi-millionaire."

He's invested over £3m during his time in the den and told us: "It's been a very important part of my life." Since 2005, he's been involved in nine series and is currently working on two new shows (one in the UK and the other in America), both in the early production stages.

Besides his busy commercial and television life, Jones has managed to maintain a seven handicap. He hits it a mile and, as you'd expect, is extremely competitive on the course...

I've been playing golf on and off for 30 years. I first started playing with some friends when I was in my teens. I'm not quite sure how I ended up with my current 7.5 handicap considering the fact that work,

A few of the the Dragon's favourite things...

● **Golfer:** A tough call but I would have to pick Jack for his record-breaking 18 majors and his great golfing mindset.

● **Fourball:** Barack Obama, Tiger Woods and my father, David, would be a great day out.

● **Possession:** My stripy socks!

● **Inspiration:** Albert Einstein.

● **Way to relax:** Watching golf on TV.

● Peter is at the helm of The Peter Jones Foundation, which raises funds through various events to help secure a brighter future for young people across the UK. Last year he hosted his annual Enterprise Golf Challenge at Bearwood Lakes GC, Berkshire, raising approximately £45,000 for the Foundation. He says: "This year is our 10th anniversary and we are focused on making it the biggest one yet."

business commitments and home life combine to ensure that I don't get onto the course as often as I'd like.

I don't get the time and chance to practice much. I suppose you could say I'm a bit of a fair weather golfer in that I tend to mainly play during my holidays in August in Portugal – I particularly enjoy Quinta do Lago – and in December in Barbados.

The only other times I get out are when I take part in charity or celebrity events. 2014 was a golden year for me in that I managed to help England win the Celebrity Cup against Scotland, Wales and Ireland at Celtic Manor and appeared in the Dunhill Links at St Andrews. Playing in events like those is much more nerve wracking than performing in front of the television cameras.

Dragon's Den is nothing compared to standing on the 1st tee at St Andrews!

One day I'd love to become a

scratch golfer. That's my ambition, but you've got to be realistic and owing to my current work/life balance it's a distinct possibility this is one goal I might not achieve. But who knows? I've got this far without regular lessons, so maybe the odd lesson here and there might put me on the right track.

I'm fiercely competitive when

I'm out on the course. Make no mistake, I play to win as well as to enjoy myself. Golf, for a few hours anyway, gets me away from all the pressures in life and business. It's something of a great escape and it might be a bit hard to believe but I prefer to keep business and pleasure separate when I'm out on the course.

I'm extremely competitive

but in a gentlemanly way. I usually play for pride and enjoyment though every so often we'll stick a tenner or £20 into the pot and that helps to keep your mind and game fully focused. But I'm nowhere near as competitive as my good friend Ian Poulter.

For me, there's no other sport

like golf. Every round is a challenge. No day is the same

in terms of the weather, playing conditions and your own game – you could be driving brilliantly one day, but hitting it all over the place off the tee the next, or putting superbly one day but three-putting on every green the next time you play. And that's what makes it so frustrating.

My worst moment in golf was

missing a two-inch putt on the 18th to draw a match against Alan Shearer at Quinta do Lago. I really do need to practise my putting! He was all smiles when he took my £20.

I've had some wonderful times on

the course but probably my best single moment was chipping in at last summer's Celebrity Cup. There were thousands of people there and it was a great feeling to see the ball drop.

I've had a hole-in-one and I know

that is considered every golfer's holy grail, but for me it was a complete and utter fluke. So much so that in my book it doesn't count so I have erased it from my memory bank. It happened many years ago on the nine-hole course at Leeds Castle in Kent and somehow, after several bounces, the ball dropped in.

My best round was a level par 72 on

the South course at Quinta do Lago. It was one of those rare days when everything went right and everything went in. It was even more pleasing to play so well on such a top course which has staged the Portuguese Open eight times, including in 1989 when Monty finished -24, won by 11 shots and smashed the course record of 63. That put my effort in the shade somewhat!

The best course I've

played is the exclusive Green Monkey course at Sandy Lane in Barbados. The conditioning is out of this world.

My favourite club is my driver, because when it goes straight it goes a long way. Unfortunately every now and then I have a tendency to slice the ball, which can put me in big trouble. You'll often see me playing on the wrong fairway!



Improve your game this **Today's Golfer Ac**

Join our team of top coaches, led by PGA Master Professional Scott



The short game days

This is a very practical day to help you become a wizard on and around the greens, so you can consistently lower your scores. You will learn vital principles that are key to you obtaining a reliable short game. You will get the chance to practice and receive coaching on all key areas. You will learn the key fundamentals of great putting, from technique to green reading, plus the key principles for chipping, pitching and sand play, and how to make effective shot choices. You will also learn how to deal with trouble shots and awkward lies. A nine-hole playing lesson is part of the day.

For more details, including prices and availability,

summer at a academy

Cranfield, at days throughout 2015

Helping you play better golf is at the heart of what we do – so we've teamed up with one of the UK's top instructors to launch the new *Today's Golfer Academy* series.

Hosted at Marriott's golf venues across the UK by PGA Master Professional Scott Cranfield, these day-long teaching sessions – taking place from May to September – will focus on improving your long or short game.

Mornings will be spent on the range fixing your faults, before you can go out on the course for nine holes after lunch to put what you've learned into practice. There will be a maximum of 15 people on the day, so you are guaranteed plenty of one-on-one instruction.

Cranfield says: "If you want to improve your game, this is an ideal opportunity. We'll be going to some great Marriott venues, from Southampton to Edinburgh.

"You will learn some real secrets on why the way you focus has a massive impact on your golf performance. You will also get to play nine holes under the watchful eye of the coaches, to help you bridge the gap between practice range and course.

"All our coaching is based on the laws of how you think and move, and no session is complete without you learning why the way you focus has a massive impact on your golf performance. This one bit of information can often cure you of anxiety, as well as improve your skills and results."

The long game days

You will learn and apply essential but often overlooked principles that allow you to swing the club in a more natural and effective way, giving you more control over your shots and more consistency. You will learn subjects that are key to you obtaining a consistent game, such as balance, posture, effective movement for power etc. While these are general subjects, our unique coaching approach will show you how these become completely personal to you, so that you can continue to benefit long after the day has finished.



Host venues

We've teamed up with Marriott to host the *Today's Golfer Academies*. Marriott has some superb courses across the UK, each one set alongside a four-star hotel. Our Long Game and Short Game days will take place every month at:

1. Dalmahoy Marriott Hotel & Country Club.
2. Hollins Hall Marriott Hotel & Country Club.
3. Breadsall Priory Marriott Hotel & Country Club.
4. Meon Valley Marriott Hotel & Country Club.
5. St Pierre Marriott Hotel & Country Club.
6. Forest of Arden Marriott Hotel & Country Club.
7. Worsley Park Marriott Hotel & Country Club.



visit www.todaysgolferacademy.co.uk

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"Golf is a game that has given me and my family great pleasure, health benefits and opportunities to meet some amazing people"

**Paul McGinley,
Captain of the
European team for
the 2014 Ryder cup**

Today's
Golfer

**GOLF
WORLD**

BGIA
BRITISH GOLF
INDUSTRY ASSOCIATION



New Gear

LATEST KIT REVEALED,
REVIEWED & RATED

EDITED BY DUNCAN LENNARD

Two views

Dual Display Technology offers a bright red display in low light and a black high contrast display.



Extra features

Bushnell says the Tour X is five times faster than other models to acquire its target, while the JOLT feature gives two vibrating bursts when it locks on.



Blackorred?

The red faceplate lets the Tour X measure slopes and can't be used in comps – so just swap it for the black, legal face.



BUSHNELL

Measure slopes, stay legal

Tour X rangefinder has a detachable face plate that offers slope info if you need it

A ccording to the R&A, you can't use distance measuring devices that factor in things like temperature, wind and slopes in competition.

So Bushnell's new Tour X laser rangefinder finally gets around the problem by offering two viewing modes – via a gradient-measuring red faceplate and a tournament-legal black one.

"With Exchange Technology, golfers are able to use the same device in practice, gaining exact yardages plus slope compensated distances, while also being able to

use the same device legally in comps – subject to local rules," explains Bushnell's Thomas Disch.

The Tour X offers accuracy of up to half-a-yard up to 125 yards. From 126 up to 1,000 yards it is accurate up to plus or minus a yard.

"Our patented Slope Technology works by instantly calculating the distance and slope angle between the player's position and their target using a built-in inclinometer," adds Disch. "Tour X then displays the degree of this angle, as well as the compensated yardage."

● **Details:** £419, www.bushnellgolf.eu



Extra flex
Velocity Slots help the clubface flex more at impact, to produce more consistent ball speeds even on mistrikes.

2

1

More hang time

A new low and back centre of gravity in all metalwoods and irons is designed to deliver a higher launch, more spin, and more air time.

ADAMS

Blue sky thinking

All-new range of woods and irons promotes launch, spin and distance

Most of us need a little help to get the ball in the air more easily, and more consistently. It makes the game more fun – and it's something Adams has focused on in its all-new Blue family.

The driver, woods, hybrids and irons feature the firm's new Easy Launch System, made up of three performance benefits that work together to give golfers more airtime:

1 Higher launch, more spin. All clubs in the Blue series are designed with the centre of gravity moved further back and lower in the head. Adams says that helps the club create more loft at impact, increasing launch angle and spin rate.

2 Forgiveness. Velocity Slot Technology encourages the entire face to flex more on impact, boosting distance on all strikes.

3 Versatility. Finally, the narrower shaft tip diameters found in the new SlimTech

shafts help to promote easy launch from any lie on the course.

"Adams Blue is engineered to help golfers hit higher, straighter shots more consistently," said Brian Bazzel, Senior Director, Product Creation.

"Through a sophisticated, simple design, Blue matches an aesthetically-pleasing look with proven performance technologies to make the game more fun for more golfers."

Smoother launch

SlimTech shafts feature narrower tip diameters to promote lower kick points and high launch conditions.

3



● **Details:** Blue driver will be available in three different lofts (9.5°, 10.5° and 12°) with a 55g Aldila SlimTech shaft at an RRP of £199. Fairway 15°, 19° or 22° with an RRP of £149. Hybrid 19°, 21°, 23° or 25° with an RRP of £129.

Blue irons are sold as either a combination set including a 3 and 4-hybrid along with the 5-iron to PW for £599 (s) or £699 (g), or just an iron-set. Irons (5-PW) will retail at £399 (s) or £499 (g). www.adamsgolf.com

TAYLORMADE

Groove is in the heart

EF Spin Groove wedge uses a face plate created to boost spin and lifespan

TaylorMade's latest wedge features a face plate not much thicker than a razor blade, and as bendable as a credit card. It's made of nickel cobalt, and designed to make your short game spinnier for longer.

The face plate is just a hundredth of an inch thick, but is extremely tough and very durable. The plate – which is bonded into the head with polymer – is the result of TaylorMade's research into electroforming – a method of shaping metal.

"It's the process they use to create those intricate medallions on the back of clubs," says wedge creator Clay Long.

"Using the process to create a wedge face has allowed us to create sharper

grooves that will retain their angles for longer – slowing the drop in performance all wedges experience as their groove edges break down." TaylorMade is conducting tests to see just how much life this new face will add.

There are two grind options. The more specialised ATV has a little less bounce, a concave sole, thicker leading edge and is ideal for firm fairways and soft sand; Tour Grind has a narrower leading edge, a slight camber and a little bit of heel shaved off to add versatility on open-face shots.

● **Details:** RRP £119. KBS Tour Wedge shaft. 47°, 50°, 52°, 54°, 56°, 58°, 60°. www.taylormadegolf.com

BEHIND THE TECH



Designer Clay Long describes how the EF's face plate works

● How does the plate increase spin?

The grooves are a little sharper because they are not machined. When you machine grooves you have to build in manufacturing tolerances so you don't go over the groove limit set by the R&A. In the EF Spin Groove, electroforming lays nickel cobalt down on a mould, made to the negative of the groove geometry, and layered on to the face like any kind of plating process. So there are sharper edges to the grooves and greater definition in their shape.

● How much spin is added?

Initial tests show an increase of about 150rpm from our old grooves on a 30-yard pitch. That's worth having, but it sits alongside the second chief benefit, which is longevity.

● How have you increased the wedge's life?

The face plate may be very thin, but it is also very tough. This means its grooves are going to last a long time before the edges start to break down.

● Won't a hard face plate affect feel?

Yes, the plate is durable, but its thinness and structure mean it has not compromised feel. Secondly, this very thin face plate is bonded with polymer into a body of carbon steel, one of the best materials for feel and sound you can get in a wedge.

Familiar look
It has the same classic shape of the brand's TP wedges.

Smoky finish
The head is made from soft carbon steel (304 stainless in the TP) and it sports a dark Smoke PVD finish.



Hot this month



Motocaddy bag range

Their biggest ever range helps you go coordinated with 17 colour options across four models. Each employs the Easilock trolley-to-bag mechanism.

● **Details:** RRP Dry Series £179.99, Pro Series £149.99, Club Series £99.99, Lite Series £79.99 www.motocaddy.com



Powakaddy trolley bags

A new trio, Premium, Deluxe and Lite, offer brighter colours and more quality. All sport 14 full-length dividers, E-Zee lift handle and an external putter bay.

● **Details:** RRP Premium £149.99, Deluxe £99.99, Lite £79.99 www.powakaddy.co.uk



Big Max Aqua 0, M and 7

These three additions to the waterproof Aqua range are more streamlined but still packed with features. 10in 0 and 9in M are cart bags with a zone for fat putter grips; 7 is a compact cart bag.

● **Details:** RRP Aqua 0 £219, Aqua M £189.99, Aqua 7 £139.99 www.bigmaxgolf.co.uk



Weightloss
The CG Black driver weighs 5g less than its predecessor, and is said to be the lightest driver on the market.

High flyer
CG has been lowered and brought forward to raise launch and lower spin.

CLEVELAND

Back to black

CG Black sheds weight to spur slower swings

How many times have you seen a tour player ripping one 360 down the middle and thought 'I just can't swing it like that.'

Cleveland Golf had the same thought, and the new CG Black drivers are the result. They estimate average golfers, especially seniors and higher handicappers, have swing speeds 15mph or more slower than tour players (who average 113mph).

So the new CG Black driver weighs 5g less than its predecessor, is the lightest driver on sale by a major company and features a lower 'swing MOI' – the moment of inertia of the entire club, from head to the butt of the shaft.

Instead of a measurement of how stable the

clubhead is on off-centre hits, swing MOI focuses on how little resistance a club has to being moved. The theory is that a 260g driver will be easier to move quickly for those with swing speeds under 90mph. There's a standard and an adjustable Custom version.

The CG Black irons are game-improvement clubs aimed at golfers who swing at less than 90mph with the driver and are looking for higher launch and more carry.

The set includes hollow hybrid-like long irons with high-strength steel faces, two-piece mid irons with a high-strength steel face insert and one-piece cavity back short irons.

A CG Black Cavity Back version is designed with better players in mind.

● **Details:** CG Black RRP £229, Custom £279. CG Black irons RRP £649, CB £700. www.clevelandgolf.com





Kuchar series

Milled from soft carbon steel with a pewter PVD finish. Available in standard (33-35in) or Armlock versions (38-44in). Feel Impact Technology face milling. £279.

BB Series

Milled from mild carbon steel with a satin silver finish. Six headshape options, HoneyComb face milling. £239.

StudioStock

Milled from soft carbon steel with a bronze finish. Mallet and blade options. Super Fly-Mill face milling. £299.

BETTINARDI

The flattest flatsticks

These new putters are milled to a thousandth of an inch... at a price

A putter with an RRP of £375 – and another with 7° of loft (most have three) – are among the latest range of 17 putters unveiled by premium flatstick crafter Bob Bettinardi.

To be fair the £375 wand is not quite typical of the range. The brand's limited-edition Signature model, is made from 303 stainless steel, "a very high-precision material used for only the finest products," Bettinardi insists.

But what the putter does share with the rest are the brand's key design traits of exceptionally precise engineering and a production process that sees putter and hosel sculpted from one block of steel (see below). "Milling from a single block permits so much precision and quality that the look and most importantly the feel will be unparalleled," Bettinardi told us.

The 7° option features in the Armlock #1, a collaboration with Matt Kuchar, who putts

with an extended grip against the inside of the lead forearm. "Testing confirmed 7° was the optimal loft to compensate for the forward press that comes with that grip," Bettinardi adds. His putters also feature three face-milling patterns – Feel Impact Technology gives the softest feel, Super Fly-Mill gives a crisper, responsive feel, while HoneyComb gives a firmer feel.

● **Details:** Prices from £240-£375, www.bettinardi.co.uk

HOW A PUTTER IS CRAFTED FROM A BLOCK OF STEEL



The putter takes shape

Hi-tech computerised milling machines sculpt the head from its single steel block.



Hosel is part of the block

Head and hosel are milled as one, avoiding the heat welding that can compromise feel.



Sole marks are added

Head markings are then cut into the clubhead, again applied with extreme precision.



Milling creates very flat face

HoneyComb milling thwarts the dishing effect that can happen with horizontal milling.

GALVIN GREEN

Come on summer, do your worst!

Latest outerwear will help you beat any weather

There may be plenty of life left in the traditional golf sweater, but lighter performance garments – such as those found in Galvin's new Insula range – provide real competition.

New for 2015, Insula jackets, pullovers and body warmers are made from a light and soft fabric which features tiny pockets that capture and retain body heat. They're designed to breathe and retain warmth as required.

A second standout product from Galvin Green's new range for spring and summer is a pair of waterproof trousers designed to stretch with a golfer's movement. The stretch material – employed in both the fabric and the lining of the Alf Stretch – is positioned in a variety of optimal directions to improve ease of movement during play. Galvin's £330 price tag underscores the technology involved.

● **Details:** www.galvingreen.com



DexInsula
Made from breathable, stretchable and warm Insula material. An ideal middle layer, it comes in a range of five colours. £110



Maddox Ventil8
Exposed parts of the shirt are armed with ventilation-boosting fabrics. £95



Akron Gore-Tex Paclite
Very light and breathable, with water-repellent zips. Adjustable at the chest and bottom edge. £200



Free app helps you beat the weather

Galvin Green's new Dress for the Weather app delivers updates on demand based on your location, before recommending the most appropriate of three layering options

– wet, cold or windy.

It then suggests coordinated garments to make up those layers, selected from the 50 products in the men's range or 30 in the ladies'. Once your

layers have been selected, it also advises you where your nearest retailer is.

The app is free to download now from Apple Store or Google Play.

Hot this month



GolfBuddy BB5 GPS Band

BB5 is part watch, part GPS, delivering distances to the front, middle and back of the green. It can also measure shot distances and how far you've walked. Rechargeable battery lasts 13 hours.

● **£199.95**, www.golfbuddy.eu



Golf Locker bags

Two new bags take the weight, the cart bag under 5lb and the stand bag under 4lb. The cart includes an insulated drinks pouch, the stand bag a cushioned seven-way divider top.

● **£59.99**, www.direct-golf.co.uk



Superstroke grips

TX1 grip sees the putter grip specialists branch into the rest of the game. The higher hand fits against a tacky corded section while the lower portion is softer to boost feel. Five colours.

● **£14.99**, www.brandfusionltd.co.uk

Fly-ZPro

This iron positions the weight low and centrally. Fly-Z Pro's better-player credentials are founded in its compact shape, low offset and thinner top line. Feel and control add to the mix with a spin-promoting milled face and a five-step forging process.

Spec: Available in 2-PW, GW, right and left-handed.



COBRA

Forged real deals

Fly-Z+ and Fly-Z+ Pro irons are aimed squarely at the shotmaker

Fly-Z+

This iron ups the feel ante further with a sixth forging step. This time the tungsten is positioned in the heel and toe of the 3-7-iron to increase twist-resistance and accuracy. Forgiveness is boosted in the 3-8-iron thanks to a weight saved through a milled undercut. Shaft vibration is muted thanks to a TPU insert.

Spec: Available in 3-PW, GW, right-hand only.

Cobra has released two better-player irons as additions to their technical Fly-Z family. Both the Fly-Z+ and Fly-Z Pro models use a sophisticated forging process and tungsten weighting to deliver what the brand's director of product marketing Jose Mirafior describes as "tour trajectories and superior feel and precision for better players". The two irons will complement the versatile Fly-Z and game-improver Fly-Z XL models.

● **Details:** Fly-Z Pro £749; Fly-Z+ £699 (eight-piece sets). www.cobragolf.com





Ask the expert

Matt Pearson is one of the world's Top 100 clubfitters



Shaft work
Puring yours
could make a
big difference.

SHAFTS

Pure results

Q Can you explain to me what shaft puring is... and whether it's worth me having it done?

Mike Hurst, Waterloooville

A No shaft is perfectly cylindrical – there is always a slight ovaling. Shaft puring aligns the tip of the oval – the longer axis – with the leading edge of the golf club. This allows the shaft to load and flex in a way that delivers the face square; if the tip of the oval points left of the blade, it will tend to close the face.

A very oval shaft, poorly aligned, could affect the face by up to four degrees at

impact, causing a shot 10-12 yards offline. That means you could miss the green with a reasonable swing.

Unpured shafts won't be the cause of your slice – and puring them won't slash your handicap. But it's one of those things that will help the club perform as well as possible. Many golfers report preferring one iron in their set, and we often find that's the one where the shaft is optimally aligned.

Our job as fitters is to rule out the club as the cause of a bad shot – and this is another aspect that contributes to that. Pured shafts mean there is another thing you can check off. Whether that's worth it to you really depends on how bad your current shafts are – so it could well be worth getting them checked.

DRIVERS

Does shorter = straighter?

Q I've been hearing a lot about how shorter drivers – and these “mini drivers” – are easier to control. Can I get an inch lopped off my driver shaft?

Steve Hale, Ipswich

A A shorter driver is easier to control than a longer one, and that's why the average tour pro's driver (44.25in) is about an inch shorter than the average club player's. Yes, a longer club can develop more speed than a shorter one, but the drop in yards isn't huge – and stats show that missing the sweetspot by 0.25in can cost you 10 yards on a 200-yard shot. Yes you can just shorten your driver, but it will make the shaft a little stiffer and the swing weight lighter. The stiffer flex I wouldn't worry about – an inch shorter will only make a quarter to a third of a flex difference. But as for the swing weight, make sure the pro pours a little tungsten powder down the shaft to return the swingweight to its original level, before replacing the grip.



WHY DO MY PUTTS JUMP OFFLINE?

Q Even my well-struck putts seem to skip offline. Could this be down to the putter – or is it my stroke?

Harry Chalmers, Potters Bar

A The area to look at is putter loft. We're all familiar with the notion of optimal driver launch

conditions, but your putter has them too. The ideal launch to get the ball rolling soonest is no more than 0.5-1°. I believe the ideal putter loft is 2.5°, which allows for a comfortable delofting during the stroke to create that launch. However, many putters on the market

are built with four or five degrees of loft. Mix in a little extra bottom hand into your putting stroke and the ball launches too high, skipping instead of achieving true roll. I'd advise you to take your putter into your local clubfitter and have its loft checked.



Got a problem?

Matt Pearson is a regular fixture in custom-fit expert KZG's worldwide top 100 clubfitters. He runs Performance Fitting Centre at Waterton Park GC, West Yorks. To ask him a question, email todaysgolfer@bauermedia.co.uk

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READER TEST

adidas Adipower Boost shoes

Four golfers try the shoes that are said to be adidas' most comfortable ever

A didas' Boost technology first hit the shelves in 2013 and has gone on to revolutionise the running market.

It now comes to golf in the form of the Adipower range, which the brand is hailing as its most comfortable golf shoes ever.

The 'Boost' material in the sole is 50 per cent lighter than EVA and features thousands of visible TPU (Thermoplastic Polyurethane) capsules fused together via a high-pressure steam moulding process. These capsules are said to store and release energy through the swing delivering maximum energy return.

But do they? And do they live up to their comfort billing? We took them to Horsley Lodge Golf Club in Derby, where four TG readers put them through their paces.

Q What are your first impressions?

MR: I really liked the modern look and colour.

DM: I had the silver ones which I like as they're easy to coordinate with lots of different golfing attire.

AP: I thought they looked great and I couldn't believe how light they were

when I lifted them out of the box.

JT: The look is perhaps a bit too modern for me, but the instant comfort outweighed that.

Q Did they deliver on comfort?

MR: Yes. They were lovely to walk around the course in and you can really feel the Boost technology in the heel.

DM: The Boost really works but they were a little bit tight. I'd recommend going for one size larger.

AP: Absolutely. I nearly had to give the game up due to a foot injury a few years ago so comfort is essential for me and these were fantastic.

JT: Very much so. The lightness made them a joy to walk around in.

Q How did they feel during your swing?

MR: I've got quite a fast swing and I didn't feel stable when I really went hard at the ball.

DM: They gave me plenty of grip.

AP: I've been working on trying to get on the balls of my feet more during the swing and these really helped with the Boost heel making

me lean forward in an athletic position.

JT: They're light but sturdy and I never felt like I was falling over.

Q Did they clean easily?

MR: They did, but I'd worry about dirt building up around the fixed "gripmore" spikes.

DM: Yes, even though the course was soggy in places. I'd happily wear them all year.

AP: After 20 seconds under the compressor they were spotless.

JT: Yes. The ClimaProof protection works with a few spots of dirt wiping off easily.

Q Will you keep wearing them?

MR: I'll be sticking with my DryJoys for now, but I'll try the Adipower Sport as I reckon the spikeless model will give me greater stability.

DM: I will if I can get the sizing right as the two-year waterproofing guarantee is a bonus.

AP: I'll definitely be sticking with them. The comfort was exceptional and that is huge.

JT: They're so light that I'll need a bit of time to get used to them, but the great comfort means I'm happy to do that.



Damian Maye
Hcp17
Current
shoes: Ecco
BiomHybrid

Mark Rogers
Hcp6
Current
shoes:
FJDryJoys

Andy Picken
Hcp20
Current
shoes:
FJContour

Jerry Turner
Hcp16
Current
shoes: Ecco
BiomHybrid

THE PRODUCT

Tech: TPU capsules are steam-moulded to create Boost cushioning providing high energy return during the swing and more comfort on the course.

Price: £129.99 in five colours (laceless Boa version £149.99)

More: www.adidasgolf.eu

TECH TESTED

Cobra's weighting games

Cobra offers three new drivers to cater for the needs of any player – but how does each model really affect different swings?

With adjustable weights, adjustable lofts, draw settings and offset, Cobra is pretty confident that its new Fly-Z series of drivers covers all bases. Slight differences in head design, plus a speed channel to maximise ball speed on off-centre hits, contribute to the technology story. Several manufacturers now offer multiple versions of the same driver for different golfers – but how do they compare in the real world?

We decided to put Cobra's claims to the test by throwing three very different amateur golfers at them. Different swings, different builds, different experience and different handicaps. Would the Fly-Z family of three models be able to cope by improving each one of them?

Craig Verrinder, Cobra's marketing manager, seemed to think so. "We are all very excited →





Take your pick
The Fly-Z and Fly-Z+ come in black, blue, white and orange.



Driver education
Sam gets the lowdown from Cobra's fitter.



Ripping it
Scott didn't even have a driver in his bag; he had so little confidence.

about the new Fly-Z family because there is something there for everyone. It's not just about losing weight, it's about where you put it. Being specific about weight placement is critically important when you're attempting to maximise distance for every player. Through advanced design we shaved weight from the face, the internal hosel structure and the crown, meaning we were able to maximise "discretionary weight" which simply means we had more freedom to place weight exactly where we wanted it.

"We can help golfers right across the board from leading Tour players, like Rickie Fowler and Lexi Thompson, to those who might be quite new into the game and looking for something that will give them all the help they can get.

The family includes a trio of models, the Fly-Z+, Fly-Z and Fly-Z XL. They have varying degrees of adjustability and are designed to fit into a particular spectrum, giving the Cobra fitters every chance of creating a perfect fit for any golfer. But this isn't always predictable, as we prove here.

The Fly-Z+ is the most high spec because it features a "Flipzone" weight in the sole which means that the centre of gravity can be moved either to the front of the clubhead or the back.

By doing so, spin rates can vary so that players either launch high with maximum carry or go for a more penetrative ball

'Being specific about weight is critical when you are attempting to maximise distance'

flight with greater roll. It is a composite construction with a carbon crown and titanium body which gives the club a slightly different sound. It has the MyFly8 system allowing eight different lofts starting at 8.5°, plus there are draw settings available on the 9°, 10° and 11° positions.

The Fly-Z is the standard version with a fixed centre of gravity in the shape of

a 15-gram weight in the back of the club to encourage a higher launch. The MyFly8 adjustability starts at 9° of loft and moves up to 12°. There is a draw bias available on each of the half loft settings.

What makes the Fly-Z XL special is the offset head. Cobra is now the only manufacturer to supply such a driver (offset moves the leading edge fractionally back in relation to the shaft). This set-up makes it easier to draw the ball. You are twice as likely to get draw with the XL than you are with the standard Fly-Z set up to a draw spec.

All three readers were fitted by Cobra's James Stafford, at Stone Driving Range in Staffordshire, to find the best-performing Fly-Z club from the three on offer for their swing.

ORANGE ISN'T THE ONLY COLOUR

That might be the colour of choice for Rickie Fowler, to reflect his Michigan State allegiance, but if orange is not your thing, then the Fly-Z+ and Fly-Z also come in blue, black and white. "The colour options have proved very popular and the white was added this season," says Verrinder. "The aesthetics on a club can play a big part because being comfortable with the look just adds to one's confidence."



Higher launch, less spin = more distance



Sam Mead Handicap: 6

Current driver: TaylorMade R11
Fitted for: Cobra Fly-Z

● **Sam says:** "I've always been quite straight off the tee and hit the ball with a slight fade, but my problem has always been getting the ball sufficiently in the air. I've never had a proper fitting and got my current club from a friend, which probably isn't the most sensible thing. Just to see the ball getting properly airborne was a marvellous feeling for me. The benefits of changing from a stiff to a lighter shaft flex amazed me."

● **James says:** "The challenge we faced with Sam was a simple one – to get the launch angle up to promote greater carry through the air. The Fly-Z was the sensible choice because the weight is set low at the back. We adjusted the loft to 12° and then swapped the stiff shaft for a much lighter one with more flex in the tip end. The results were immediately much better gaining us more airtime and greater distance."



SAM'S TRACKMAN NUMBERS

Old launch 8.2° **Carry** 176.6 yards **Total** 225.5 yards
New launch 11.5° **Carry** 206.5 yards **Total** 234.9 yards



Scott Wallace Handicap: 15

Current driver: 'Don't use one, just a 3-wood'
Fitted for: Cobra Fly-Z+

● **Scott says:** "The driver can be a real nightmare for me because it can go so far off line – to be honest I don't carry one at the moment and just use a 3-wood. I just don't have any confidence with it. Working with the guys from Cobra was a revelation. They were instant with all the figures and knew exactly what to do to help me. They've given me the Fly-Z + with the weight forward and a much stiffer shaft and now I can hit so many more fairways."

● **James says:** "We needed to address the spin rate here and try and do something to help Scott keep the ball straighter. He has colossal power and can fly the ball 250 yards with ease. Flip it and rip it was a perfect match for him. Putting the weight forward lowered his spin by almost 1000rpm and with the addition of a heavier 80-gram extra stiff shaft, we were able to give him control he's never had. His dispersion was massively improved."



SCOTT'S TRACKMAN NUMBERS

Old spin 3660rpm **Carry** 242 yards **Total** 262 yards
New spin 2880rpm **Carry** 252 yards **Total** 270 yards



Chris Clarke Handicap: 24

Current driver: TaylorMade Burner
Fitted for: Cobra Fly-Z XL

● **Chris says:** "I've really only been playing for six months and I was given this old driver by a friend, it wasn't fitted for me. I've struggled with it really, but changing to the Fly-Z XL has transformed things. It's amazing what some good results can do. The offset made me feel like I might hit it left, but I just drilled it down the middle. In the first dozen swings, I hit shots that I didn't think were possible for me. I loved it. The technology benefits were surprising."

● **James says:** "If you lack confidence in a driver then it can be very difficult to be consistent. The Fly-Z XL is a perfect fit in this case because the offset head helped stop Chris losing the ball to the right. Suddenly, he was nailing shots down the middle. We gave him a regular shaft and the spin rate and ball speed were much more where we'd like to see them. We got his average carry up by more than 12 yards."



CHRIS' TRACKMAN NUMBERS

Old clubspeed 119.6mph **Spin** 4077rpm **Carry** 174.6 yards
New clubspeed 124.6mph **Spin** 2928rpm **Carry** 186.8 yards

Lie detector

Having your clubs custom-fitted is a bit like eating fruit and veg – we know it's a good idea, but that doesn't actually make us do it. The majority of club golfers are still happy to buy clubs off the rack – even though the performance benefits of tailored equipment are widely accepted.

This new series is designed to address that. In each one, I'll hit shots using both ill-fitting clubs, and clubs optimised for me. Launch monitor TrackMan will record the results. In this way we will define the true benefits of custom-fit. It's my belief that, when you see these figures, you'll find it hard to justify not being fitted.



Here, I've hit a 7-iron set up identically to my own with one exception – the lie angle is 3° more upright. Though we can't of course see the heel digging in, TrackMan results clearly show the effects of that upright lie. After five shots, my average face angle is a massive 7.3° closed. This has reduced face loft at impact (dynamic loft), and reduced spin. The ball has gone low and left, missing my centre line by an average of 25.5 yards. That's enough not just to miss the green but also its edges, meaning water, trees or bushes.

Av face angle at impact: -7.3° (closed)
Av distance from target: 77.5 feet left



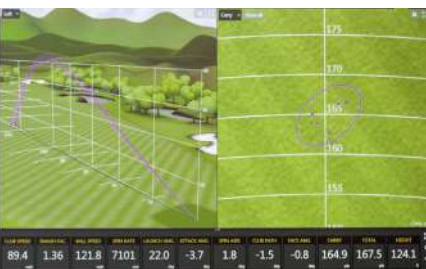
Heel can dig at impact, closing the face and sending the ball left.



This time
the toe
can catch
the turf,
opening
the face.



All clubs - from putter to driver - should sole flat on the ground when the club strikes the ball.



Now I'm hitting my own 7-iron, at one degree upright some three degrees flatter than the first club. Instantly we can see the key difference – my face angle at impact has gone from 7.3° shut to 0.8° open. This has clear implications for the flight – higher, more spin and control – but of course the main one is accuracy: from averaging 25 yards left of target, my average is now 0.2 yards right. My ball has gone from the water to the middle of the green, a change effected through nothing other than the lie angle of the club.

Av face angle at impact: -0.8° (closed)
Av distance from target: 0.6 feet right

Lie angle is the angle between the shaft and the horizontal when the club is soled in its playing position. An optimised lie angle is vital for your irons because it permits impact with the sole flush to the ground.

If the lie angle is too upright for you, the heel can dig in at impact and the face twists closed; if the lie is too flat, the toe digs in and the face opens. Either compromises distance and consistency, but mostly accuracy.



New
Gear



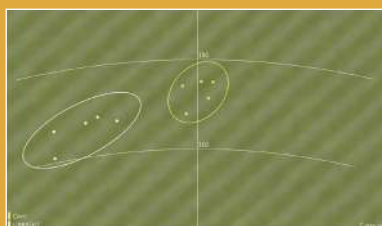
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Fitting benefits

Your height, arm length, set-up preference and shaft length and flex can all affect the optimal lie angle for your game, and a fitting will monitor lie angle at address and impact to get this right.

**NEXT
MONTH:**
HOW SHAFT
FLEX AFFECTS
DISTANCE

THE VERDICT



Revealed: the truth about lies

A three-degree error in lie angle may seem pretty extreme, but it is by no means rare for a clubfitter to find this; remember we are mostly concerned with impact lie angle, which is at the mercy not just of your build but also your swing. It serves to show just how profoundly that simple angle between shaft and sole affects accuracy and consistency. If your shots typically tail left or right, and you can't explain why, take a lie detector test.

Key stat

A lie angle that's three degrees out equals 25 yards offline (above).

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Wilson Staff

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cobra

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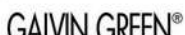
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EDITED BY KEVIN BROWN

World fame
Woodhall Spa's
Hotchkin is one
of the world's
best courses.

REGIONAL GUIDE

Lincolnshire

Home to one of the world's best courses and some of the best value golf around

WORDS KEVIN BROWN

It may be home to one of the world's best courses and Ping's European HQ, but it's taken a while for Lincolnshire to hit the golfing headlines. The county's golf union was formed in 1900, a decade after the first club, Stamford's Burghley Park, opened. The East Midlands' biggest county now has 51 member clubs, providing quality as well as quantity.

And at the top of the hit list is wonderful Woodhall Spa, home of England Golf (formerly the English Golf Union) and the

awesome Hotchkin course – one of England's top 10 of the world's top 100 layouts. Reigning Lincs county champion Simon Richardson may be a tad biased but he hit the nail square on the head when he summed up: "I always enjoy playing at Woodhall even though the punishing bunkers of the heathland layout ensure it's a serious test."

Woodhall may be the jewel in Lincolnshire's crown but the county, which covers a staggering 2,500sq miles from the fens in the south to the industrial Humber estuary in the

north, has plenty of other gems. Richardson added: "There's a lot of quality even though we're not blessed with Championship courses. The county definitely makes the most of the ordinary terrain and landscape."

He's not wrong. A sizeable portion of Lincs is featureless farmland but the architects behind the likes of Woodhall and Forest Pines proved that's not a barrier to creating courses with serious wow factor. And while the county can't offer hills, it can offer some of the best value golf around. ■





Large hazard
Rutland Water
makes the most
of its location.

Indeed it beggars belief that you can experience the two superstars – Woodhall and Forest Pines – for £70 (England Golf members) and £50 respectively: if you transported these two to the south-east or Home Counties you would have to double your money at the very least. Parting company with £50 will also get you on Seacroft's highly underrated links in the seaside resort of Skegness.

Seacroft is actually the county's only true links and in fact is the sole links between Hunstanton in Norfolk and Seaton Carew on Teesside. It features tight, gently undulating hogsback fairways, several blind and semi-blind shots, 75 bunkers and glorious views over The Wash.

Originally a quaint little nine-holer, it was extended to 18 holes by Willie Fernie in 1900 and lengthened a couple of years ago, meaning it can be a bit of a brute if the wind is up.

Next closest to a links is just down the coast close to Butlin's holiday camp. North Shore is a James Braid creation and a fine mixture of links and parkland holes. There is a hotel on site so you can tumble out of bed and be on the 1st tee in minutes. Plus,

The courses

● Woodhall Spa

Green fees:
Hotchkin - £70
(England Golf), £90
(non-EG); Bracken
- £52/£62. Contact:
01526 352 511.

● Forest Pines

Green fees: Mon-Fri
£50; Sat-Sun £60.
Contact: 01652
650756.

● Kenwick Park

Green fees: £50.
2-FORE!-1: Thurs
only. Contact: 01507
607161.

● North Shore

Green fees: Mon-Fri
£36; Sat-Sun £42.
£20 after 2pm
Sun-Fri. 2-FORE!-1:
Mon-Fri. Contact:
01754 764822.



Fine pines
Forest Pines is
a superb stay-
and-play option.

North Shore belongs to 2-FORE!-1 so you and a mate can play for half-price.

North Shore is one of a crop of splendid stay-and-play venues with Forest Pines near Brigg arguably the standout. The flagship Q Hotels venue opened in 1996 is undoubtedly one of the best new courses to emerge in England over the past two decades. It's home of 27 holes and three outstanding loops of nine (Forest, Pines and Beeches) and was in the running to host this year's Solheim Cup – the women's equivalent of the Ryder Cup.

With mature timber lining most fairways, Forest Pines was the handiwork of John Morgan and has been favourably dubbed the 'Woburn

of the North.' Course management and accurate play with every club in your bag is the name of the game here. Anything wayward is bound to be punished and could leave you scrambling among the assorted timber for par... or worse. You'll be impressed off the course too with the smart four-star hotel providing excellent accommodation and spa.

The solitary five-star venue also belongs to Q Hotels and can be found at Belton Woods, which formerly came under the De Vere umbrella. It sits just outside Grantham and has two courses (Lakes & Woodside). It's also extremely handy for the 27 holes (three loops of nine) plotted amidst historic parkland where deer roam free in nearby Belton Park. Founded in 1890, Belton Park is one of the oldest clubs in Lincolnshire and provides genuine parkland action that is easy on the eye.

Another outstanding all-round venue is Greetham Valley just north of Stamford off the A1, which officially sits just outside Lincolnshire in England's smallest county, Rutland. Set within 260 rolling acres of scenic countryside, perfect for birdwatching,

DO IT YOURSELF

Where to stay

If you prefer to stay on site so to speak, you're well catered for thanks to a collection of impressive stay-and-play venues with the pick of them including Forest Pines, Belton Woods, Greetham Valley, North Shore and Kenwick Park.

There are several good options around Woodhall Spa too including the recently refurbished, classic-style Inn and Woodhall Spa, which following a £2m plus investment, now features 26 rooms, a brasserie, bar and tap room, sports bar, family room and huge play area.

Kenwick Park has a Best Western hotel set within the grounds of a 320-acre estate in an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and promises a relaxing break with everything from putting to pampering on site.

Do it yourself

Deal 1: Woodhall Spa: One night's B&B at the Inn at Woodhall Spa and one round on the Hotchkin course (May 1-Oct 31) costs £124 per person. Book on 01526 352511 or e-mail booking@woodhallspagolf.com

Deal 2: Forest Pines: One night's dinner, bed and breakfast, 36 holes of golf and full use of the leisure facilities from £109pp (based on a twin room). Book on 01652 650770.

Deal 3: Greetham Valley: One night's dinner (three-course), bed and breakfast and two rounds costs £125pp until Oct 31 (based on two sharing twin/king size accommodation, below). Sunday Driver (one night, two rounds) costs £90, two-night break costs £195. Book on 01780 460444.



2-FORE! 1 star
Stoke Rochford's mature, rolling parkland layout.



Wildlife haven
Deer roam through Belton Park's 27 holes.



Major pedigree
Tony Jacklin learnt the game at Elsham.

Greetham boasts two contrasting 18-hole layouts (Lakes & Valley), a nine-hole par-3 academy course, good practice facilities, an on-site hotel, lodges and cottage, fishing lakes, walking routes, a well-equipped gym and physiotherapy suite. TG is particularly fond of Greetham's shorter, tighter and more aesthetically pleasing Valley layout with its fantastic set of short holes.

Nearby you'll discover another little cracker in the shape of Rutland Water Golf Club, which has blossomed into a fine and challenging layout, next to one of Europe's largest man-made reservoirs.

But of course the course everyone wants to play is Woodhall's world-class Hotchkin.

Originally designed by Harry Vardon and JH Taylor and later worked on by Harry Colt and its owners the Hotchkin family (chiefly Stafford Vere Hotchkin), the 110-year-old course is a classic and seriously tough heathland. If you're not at your best it can be punishing – the bunkers require steps to exit them! It makes sound sense to warm-up on the Bracken, a fine 1998 Donald Steel parkland alternative.

'Woodhall's Hotchkin can be punishing – the bunkers require steps to exit'

Don't expect this to be a pushover, though. The USGA greens are devilishly difficult while during the summer the rough can be punishing.

Wherever you go in this huge county and regardless of the time of year you can be sure you'll find a decent course in good, playable condition. Among the best of Lincolnshire's rest is Kenwick Park, on the edge of the Lincolnshire Wolds. It really has blossomed since opening in 1982, featuring a mixture of holes within mature parkland and woodland, and complemented by a network of lakes that are a haven for wildlife and errant golf balls.

Meanwhile, close to Forest Pines you'll find lovely Elsham, now rather harshly overshadowed by its superstar North Lincolnshire neighbour. But

The courses

Greetham Valley

Green fees: Mon-Fri £22.50 (round), £37.50 (day); Sat-Sun £27.50/£37.50. Contact: 01780 460444.

Seacroft

Green fees: Mon-Fri £50; Sat-Sun £60. Contact: 01754 769624.

Belton Park

Green fees: Mon-Fri £45; Sat-Sun £55. Contact: 01476 567399.

Elsham

Green fees: £40. 2-FORE! 1: Mon-Fri. Contact: 01652 680291.

Elsham is a fine parkland/heathland track in its own right and is where two-time Major winner and Ryder Cup saviour Tony Jacklin learnt the golfing ropes as a budding youngster. Like Kenwick Park, it also happens to be in 2-FORE!-1 as does Stoke Rochford – a mature layout built on rolling parkland next to the A1 south of Grantham and in the shadow of the spectacular Stoke Rochford Hall – an 1840's Grade I Victorian Mansion and a wonderful place to spend the night.

Elsewhere, Market Rasen and , Lincoln Golf Club – better known as Torksey (where it is located) – both fall into the hidden gem category.

Market Rasen is a short but charming century-old heathland layout and though just over 6,000 yards in length, you can't afford to be gung-ho and take liberties specially with the river Rase flowing through it. Plus most fairways are tight and lined by a variety of timber, chiefly of the pine variety, so if you go off the straight and narrow you're likely to be punished.

Torksey has been on its present site since 1903 and is a delight to play with its flat, easy walking fairways

The courses

● Market Rasen & District

Green fees: Mon-Fri £35; Sat-Sun £38.
Contact: 01673 842319.

● Lincoln GC

Green fees: Mon-Fri £40; Sat-Sun £50.
Contact: 01427 718721.

● Stoke Rochford

Green fees: Mon-Fri £38; Sat-Sun £50.
Reduced weekend rates after 2.30pm.
2-FORE!-1: Mon-Fri.
Contact: 01476 530275.

● Gainsborough

Green fees: Both courses - Mon-Fri £25; Sat-Sun £35.
Contact: 01427 613088.

being overlooked by mature trees. There are some serious water hazards to negotiate but they clearly didn't inconvenience former Ryder Cup captain Mark James who set a course record of 65 when playing in the Lincolnshire Open here.

A 15-minute drive from Torksey brings you to Gainsborough Golf Club, Ping's European HQ and home to two 18-hole courses, Thonock Park and Karsten Lakes. This year, for the first time, golfers can book a Ping Experience Day, which includes a behind-the-scenes tour of the Ping factory and visit to the fitting centre followed by lunch and a round on one of the courses – all for just £49 a head.

In summary, Lincolnshire may lack in links and championship courses, but in terms of value, welcoming visitors and the variety of inland layouts it's unquestionably a class act. As Richard Latham, General Manager at Woodhall Spa, says: "It may be something of a golfing backwater, but come to play golf in Lincolnshire and you'll definitely enjoy it." And ultimately, that is what a golf day or weekend is all about.

OFF COURSE

● The Lincolnshire Aviation Heritage Centre – A unique chance to step back in time in East Kirkby near Skegness on a World War II airfield, once home to 57 and 630 squadrons.

● Lincoln Cathedral – One of the finest Gothic buildings in Europe towers above the city and is visible from 25 miles away. With its awe-inspiring Romanesque West Front, it has been a place of worship for almost 1,000 years.

● Burghley House , Stamford Boasts 18 magnificent State Rooms and one of the most important private art collections of 17th century. Starred in major movies including Pride and Prejudice and the Da Vinci Code.

● The historic Kinema in the Woods at Woodhall Spa – Watch a Saturday evening flick and you'll be entertained during the interval by the resident organist!

Par-3 stars
Greetham Valley's short holes live in the memory.

Calling it a 'water hazard' doesn't quite do it justice

This is Royal Porthcawl, home of the 2014 and 2017 Senior Open Championship, so a bit of a test. Like all our other world-class but refreshingly unstuffy links courses, Royal Porthcawl rewards accuracy rather than brute force. We think you'll enjoy the challenge. Even if you do take a shot or two more than usual on some holes. Still, with views like this, you'll never have a better excuse for three-putting.

For your chance to win a Wales golf break or to request a
Wales Golf guide visit golfasitshouldbe.com/GF15-GB02

The ultimate weekend in... Suffolk

A quaint corner of East Anglia bristling with quality golf courses, whether you are



Classic parkland

Bury St Edmunds ▲

Well-established parkland on the western outskirts of the town near the A14. Created by Ted Ray, it is regarded as one of Suffolk's finest. It is backed by a nine-holer with a mix of par 4s and tricky 3s. **Green fees:** Mon-Fri £40; Sat-Sun £50. Tel: 01284 755979.



Stowmarket ▲

Another mature parkland but although the club was founded in 1902, the pretty course has only been on its current site since 1962. A great variety of holes, quality greens and captivating views. **Green fees:** Mon-Fri £36; Sat-Sun £46. Tel: 01449 736473.

Rookery Park

Drains exceptionally well so is good all year round. Rookery Park is a fun par 72 located on the A146 between Lowestoft and Beccles. But beware of two ponds lurking on the signature 8th hole. **Green fees:** Mon-Fri from £20; Sat-Sun Members only. Tel: 01502 509190.

Haverhill

A lovely place to play, with the course sitting on parkland across two valleys: the front nine, with its undulating fairways, is complemented by a saucer-shaped back nine bisected by the river Stour. **Green fees:** Mon-Fri £34; Sat-Sun £45. Tel: 01440 761951.



Highly challenging

Woodbridge ▲

Home of the classic Heath course within an Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. Plenty of trees, heather, gorse and bunkers to negotiate, so it provides a serious year-round examination. **Green fees:** Mon-Fri £55; Sat-Sun £65. Tel: 01394 382038.

Aldeburgh

Features in most Top 100 Courses listings and is a club that promotes foursomes. Plotted on classic heathland with gorse-lined fairways, it's close to the coast with fast-draining sandy soil. **Green fees:** Mon-Fri £80 (round/day); Sat-Sun £85 (round/day). Tel: 01728 452890.

Felixstowe Ferry

One of the oldest courses in England (founded in 1880) and arguably one of the most underrated: the par-72 Martello layout is an undulating and testing links with coastal views. **Green fees:** Mon-Fri 50; Sat-Sun £60 (after 1pm). Tel: 01394 286834.



Ipswich GC ▲

Known locally as 'Purdie's Heath' – where the course has been sited since James Braid routed it in 1926. You can warm up on the neighbouring nine-hole Bexley, plotted on the same splendid heathland. **Green fees:** Mon-Fri £55; Sat-Sun £65. Tel: 01473 724017.



Family friendly

Fynn Valley ▲

This friendly, family-run club is set in rolling countryside near Ipswich and the main 18-hole parkland is backed up by a nine-holer, 22-bay floodlit covered range, two golf shops and a robust clubhouse. **Green fees:** Mon-Fri £28; Sat-Sun £35. Tel: 01473 785463.



West Suffolk Golf Centre ▲

Decent all-round venue which initially set out with just three holes but eventually became a full 18-hole layout with the addition of six new holes in 2007. Other facilities include a 14-bay floodlit driving range. **Green fees:** From £5-£21. Tel: 01638 718972.

Clare Park Lake

For 90 minutes of fun, this venue will oblige, as it claims to be the 'friendliest short course in the county'. It's the home of a scenic nine-hole par-3 parkland set around a tree-shaded lake near the Stour. **Green fees:** From £7. Tel: 01787 278693.

Hintlesham

Opened in 1990 in 150 acres of rolling countryside within the grounds of Hintlesham Hall, it provides a warm atmosphere as well as a challenging on-course test, especially tough par 3s. **Green fees:** Mon-Fri £40; Sat-Sun £48. Tel: 01473 652761.

looking for links action, great value or a play-and-stay venue



2-FORE!-1 stars

Thorpeness ▲

A star of 2-FORE!-1. A quality heathland, with the James Braid gem meandering through silver birch, gorse and heather close to the coast. It is sand based and there is accommodation on site.

Green fees: Mon-Thurs £64 a day; Fri – Sun £68 a day. **Tel:** 01728 454926.



Ufford Park ▲

Gently undulating parkland which is fast draining. A top place to stay and play – there's a splendid hotel on site – and the facilities include a spa and one of the best driving ranges around.

Green fees: Mon-Thurs from £23; Fri-Sun from £31. **Tel:** 01394 383555.

Suffolk G&CC

Home of the par-72 Genevieve course, a splendid parkland with the river Lark running through it and featuring on a number of holes. There's also a 40-room hotel with an indoor pool, sauna and steam room on site.

Green fees: £32. **Tel:** 01284 706777.

Rushmere

This fine heathland can be found on the outskirts of Ipswich and although fairly short in overall length, it requires real accuracy with most holes lined by gorse and ancient timber so good course management is essential.

Green fees: £26. **Tel:** 01473 725648.



Nine-hole gems

Southwold ▲

Delightful, highly-challenging James Braid nine-holer in north-east Suffolk with 18 different tees encouraging you to do better second time around. Plotted on fast-draining heathland close to the coast, so the wind is usually a factor.

Green fees: £30-£33. **Tel:** 01502 723234.

High Lodge

You can pitch up when you like in order to tackle the 2,500-yard nine-holer that features six par 4s and a trio of par 3s. Very popular with families and beginners.

Green fees: Mon-Fri £8.50 (9 holes) & £12.50 (18 holes); Sat-Sun £9.50/£13.50. **Tel:** 01986 784347.

Royal Worlington & Newmarket

Often titled the 'Best nine-hole course in the world', this is no ordinary short course. It is steeped in history, being founded in 1893 and is laid out on gently undulating sandy-based soil that drains well all year round.

Green fees: £55. **Tel:** 01638 712216.



Flempton ▲

A hidden nine-hole gem although it has been around since 1895, Flempton is a charming, easy-walking inland links overlooked and guarded by a variety of trees, including pine, plus gorse bushes.

Green fees: £40 (18 holes). **Tel:** 01284 728291.

The insider's guide

Suffolk is not one of the iconic venues in English golf but that's not to say it doesn't have quality and variety in its golf offering. It has several Top 100-calibre courses and an excellent choice of links, heathlands and parklands. Plus, as a familiar holiday destination, it also offers lots of accommodation and dining options.

Where to stay

Suffolk boasts four stay-and-play venues and TG's particular favourites are Ufford Park and Thorpeness. Hintlesham Hall, a Grade 1-listed Elizabethan Manor House, and Suffolk Golf & Spa complete the set. Hintlesham Hall is convenient for county capital Ipswich, which also has three Premier Inns (there's another in Lowestoft).

Handy for a visit to Felixstowe Ferry is the Orwell Hotel, a large Victorian hotel with 60 rooms close to the train station.

Useful information:

suffolkhotelsguide.com;
suffolkgolfunion.co.uk;
visitsuffolk.com; discoversuffolk.org.

Where to eat & drink

Suffolk is the home of two of the country's largest breweries (Greene King and Adnams) while excellent meals are served at reasonable prices in the restaurants at Ufford Park and Thorpeness. The latter also boasts a cosy bar area while fine dining can be experienced at Hintlesham. For other options visit suffolktouristguide.com/Eating-Out-in-Suffolk.asp

Other things to do

- Check out the fascinating Norfolk & Suffolk Aviation Museum at Flixton, home of 66 aircraft (including cockpits), and more than 30,000 smaller artefacts.
- There are 51 nature reserves and wildlife sites managed by Suffolk Wildlife Trust, with the RSPB site at Minsmere being the pick.
- Africa Alive! (Lowestoft) – This popular zoo near Lowestoft is home to more than 80 species of animals from Africa.
- Southwold Pier – This historic pier provides plenty of attractions and entertainment.
- Framlingham Castle is a 12th century fortress in which Mary Tudor took refuge.
- The Medieval village of Lavenham is like stepping back in time, including the late 14th century Hall House.



Tree-lined test
The Longcross requires excellent course strategy.

STAY AND PLAY

Foxhills, Surrey

This luxury countryside retreat boasts 45 superb holes

Foxhills is the complete country club. Family-owned and family-friendly, the resort offers leisure activities galore, including 45 holes of quality golf.

Sitting in 440 acres of Surrey countryside on London's doorstep and 20-minutes from Heathrow, Foxhills is reaping the rewards of a recent £1.2m refurbishment that included 20 new poolside bedrooms, a Cocktail and Lounge bar, and the clubhouse's new look Nineteen Restaurant.

It's golfing pedigree is good with European Tour stars Paul Casey and Anthony Wall both products of the Foxhills Junior Foundation, and the retreat will host the popular Senior PGA Professional Championship for the second time from May 13-15.

● On-course

Home of two stunning but contrasting courses. TG's favourite is the shorter but densely tree-lined Longcross, which requires excellent course management and strategy. The undulating layout has a splendid combination of exceptional holes, with many played from elevated tees. The par-5 14th is one of those and it's the

The facts

● **Top deal:**
One night midweek break (B&B and one round of golf) costs from £105-£160pp.

● **Green fees:**
Mon-Thurs: £80;
Fri-Sun £90;
Twilight £40.

● **Contact:**
Hotel - 01932 704500; Golf - 01932 704465.
www.foxhills.co.uk

pick of the bunch, playing to a fairway dissecting an avenue of mature trees way down below. From there you have to avoid a ditch running short of the sizeable green and a huge tree guarding the left side.

The neighbouring Bernard Hunt course – named after the former club pro and late European Tour maestro (he won 30 times and played in 10 Ryder Cups, twice as captain) – is longer, more open and pure parkland with more undulating, faster greens.

Both courses finish at a shared green in front of the clubhouse and are supported by the nine-hole par-3 Manor Course and a splendid new covered driving range.

● Off-course

Where do we start? It has a superb Spa, four swimming pools, three restaurants, tennis and squash courts, a state-of-the-art gym, excellent clubhouse and even a Children's Clubhouse, making this a destination for all the family.

But at the centre of everything is the striking 19th century Manor House, flanked by the well-appointed four-star accommodation.



Top to bottom: The Hunt Course, named after Foxhills' former club pro and Ryder Cup Captain, Bernard; the beautiful 19th century Manor House; one of the poolside suites created in the £1.2m refurbishment.

MY TOP 10 COURSES



Tony Jacklin

The two-time Major champion selects his favourites in the UK

The word legend is often over-used in sport but as far as Tony Jacklin is concerned it is perfectly fitting. The man from Lincolnshire captured the Open and US Open titles in consecutive years and also revitalised the Ryder Cup.

He made seven Ryder Cup playing appearances but it was as captain that he really shone, breaking America's domination.

After playing on many of the world's most iconic courses, Jacklin retired from tournament golf in 2004 and turned his attention to designing courses with The Concession – created with Jack Nicklaus after the Golden Bear's famous gesture at the 1969 Ryder Cup – being his first.

Other projects include Secret Valley (Cyprus), San Roque (Spain), Turkey's Klassis Golf and CC and two Moroccan layouts – while he's currently creating a new par-3 course, driving range and academy at Magnolia Park Golf & CC (www.magnoliapark.co.uk).

● Sunningdale, Surrey

With the magical Old and New courses you really are spoilt for choice. I've mostly played the Old – brimming with charm and character. It's such a wonderful place and you always get the feelgood factor here. **Green fees:** £205.

● Wentworth, Surrey

Big changes have taken place recently and to be honest I would rather have seen more of a heathland feel thrown back into the mix. It's more of a test than neighbouring Sunningdale. **Green fees:** Members & members' guests only.

● Woodhall Spa, Lincs

I played the Hotchkin course a lot



Bygone charm
Swinley Forest
is a glorious step
back in time.

when I was younger growing up in Lincolnshire. Although it's very flat it has a lot of charm and overall is a super course; you've got to avoid the big penal bunkers at all costs. **Green fees:** £75.

● Royal Birkdale, Merseyside

I'm a great fan of links golf and Birkdale is right up there among the best in the UK if not the world! It weaves in and out of dunesland and overall is a superb test of golf and a fantastic Open venue. **Green fees:** £195-£235.

● Royal Lytham & St Annes, Lancs

This has to be included, doesn't it (he won The Open there in 1969)? You can hardly call it a beautiful-looking course but I'll always have a soft spot for it. It's a unique place and a great test. **Green fees:** £180-£220.

My golf CV

- Four-time PGA Tour winner.
- Eight European Tour wins and 22 European wins, achieving a lot of success before the Tour was born.
- Major victories in successive years (1969 Open at Royal Lytham and 1970 US Open at Hazeltine, the first Brit winner of the latter since 1920).
- European Tour money leader, 1973.
- Awarded OBE in 1970, CBE in 1990 and is a member of World Golf Hall of Fame.
- Played in seven Ryder Cups between 1967-79 and was captain in 1983, '85, '87 & '89.

● Turnberry, Ayrshire

In many ways the ultimate links venue with two great courses and a hotel on a spectacular coastal site. I've spent many happy weeks here down the years. **Green fees:** £230.

● Old Course, St Andrews, Fife

It's unique and simply has to be included in any top 10. I go back with the Old Course a long way – when I tried to qualify for the 1964 Open at the Home of Golf. **Green fees:** £80-£170.

● Kingsbarns, Fife

Probably the best of the modern links and it's hard to believe it's only 15 years old. A nice challenge and provides sea views on every hole. **Green fees:** £194-£226.

● Muirfield, East Lothian

One helluva course; I've always enjoyed playing here. It's a superstar within wonderful golfing country but is a very fair links where you can run the ball into the greens. **Green fees:** £210.

● Swinley Forest, Berkshire

This place and course has got an old-fashioned feel and I love this sand belt country and love Swinley's heather and contrast of colours. **Green fees:** £175 in midweek.



Modern links
Kingsbarns is a
classic despite
its youth.

PRIZE DRAW

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Unwind with two nights at Crown Golf's flagship venue



Golfer
TRAVEL
AWARD
WINNERS
2015

Major class
The Nicklaus
was Jack's
first UK
course design.

Set in 450 acres of stunning Cornish countryside, the multi award-winning St Mellion International Resort is one of the best stay-and-play venues England has to offer.

Indeed when it comes to golf breaks, few UK destinations can match magnificent St Mellion with its two outstanding 18-hole courses and 80-bedroom four-star hotel with excellent on-site facilities. Now we're giving you the chance to experience it for yourself. The lucky winner of this superb prize will enjoy a two-night break for two people, including dinner, bed and breakfast and three rounds of golf (two on the Kernow course and one on the stunning Nicklaus).

St Mellion registered a double success in the latest Today's Golfer Travel Awards, capturing both the best hotel/resort and course (the Nicklaus layout) titles. Having opened in 1988, the Nicklaus recently celebrated its 25th anniversary and the layout



just keeps getting better with age.

The flagship venue of Crown Golf has a glorious past having staged the European Tour's Benson & Hedges International Open six times and everyone wants to tee it up on the mighty Nicklaus – the ultimate parkland test was the 18-time Major champion's first UK course – though the neighbouring Kernow is a splendid layout in its own right.

You'll have a good time off the course too:

visitors can choose from three different dining experiences – fine dining, brasserie-style and a comprehensive bar food menu – and can unwind in style in the Elemis spa health & fitness club featuring three indoor pools.

The impressive combination of its tranquil location, standout facilities and great golf ensures St Mellion is the perfect place for golf and leisure breaks and family holidays.

● For more details about the resort or to arrange a stay call 01579 351351 (main hotel number), 01579 352001 (reservations team) or visit www.st-mellion.co.uk

HOW TO ENTER

To be in with a chance of winning this superb prize simply log on to www.todaysgolfer.co.uk/win, click on the St Mellion prize option and enter your e-mail address. Entries close at midnight on May 13. Full prize terms and conditions can be found on the Today's Golfer website.

ENTER NOW AT WWW.TODAYSGOLFER.CO.UK/WIN

HALF-PRICE GOLF

Stay-and-play venues

Seven 2-FORE!-1 members that will impress you on and off the course

1 Point at Polzeath, Cornwall

Par 72, 6,028 yards

A wonderful all-round North Cornwall venue (formerly Roserrow G&CC) that is going from strength to strength under the guidance and investment of Jeremy and Eva Davies, who are determined to put the Point firmly on the map. The opening of seven new on-site apartments in addition to the existing accommodation should enable them to do just that.

Green fees: £45 (summer day rate).

2-FORE!-1: All week except in Jul & Aug (Mondays only). **Tel:** 01208 864601.

2 Heacham Manor, Norfolk

Par 72, 6,089 yards

This seaside venue just outside Hunstanton has bags of appeal on and off the course. The fast-maturing coastal course unusually features several lakes, most notably the par-3 7th, while a meandering river comes into play on the closing holes. It's supported by splendid manor house accommodation and Avocet bar and spa that have been created from an old barn.

Green fees: Mon-Fri: £25 a round, £35 a day; Sat-Sun: £30 a round. **2-FORE!-1:** Mon-Fri (on day rate). **Tel:** 01485 536030.

3 Vale Resort, South Wales

Par 73, 6,617 yards

A short drive down the M4 from Cardiff

you'll discover this outstanding four-star resort with excellent accommodation and facilities, including a stunning spa and two contrasting 18-hole courses. The main attraction is the formidable Wales National, which opened just over a decade ago.

Green fees: £30-£70. **2-FORE!-1:** All week (against highest rate). **Tel:** 01443 667800.

4 Stapleford Park, Leicestershire

Par 73, 6,465 yards

Plotted within 500 acres of Capability Brown landscaped grounds you'll find a Donald Steel-designed course which has successfully staged star-studded European Seniors Tour action. The course is overlooked by a luxury hotel supported by a sensational spa, treatment rooms and a gym within a Victorian stable block.

Green fees: £60. **2-FORE!-1:** Mon-Fri. **Tel:** 01572 787044.

5 Prince's, Kent

Par 72 (Shore/Dunes), 6,602 yards

This historic links venue is now backed up by The Lodge, which opened in 2012 and offers 38 bedrooms with en-suite facilities and either course or Bay of Sandwich views. Prince's, scene of the 1932 Open won by Gene Sarazen, is the neighbour of Royal St George's and provides 27 holes of quality seaside golf.

Green fees: From May 1 £60 Mon-Thurs,

£90 Fri-Sun, including coffee & bacon roll on arrival. £15 for an extra nine holes.

2-FORE!-1: Mon & Tues after midday.

Tel: 01304 611118.

6 Shrigley Hall, Cheshire

Par 71, 5,926 yards

Scenically located in 262 acres of grounds on the edge of the Peak District National Park in the quaint village of Pott Shrigley, this is the home of a grand 19th century country house hotel which overlooks a mature parkland course with a splendid variety of holes. Afterwards, you can relax in style in the spa housed in a former church next door.

Green fees: From £25 in summer. **2-FORE!-1:** All week. **Tel:** 01625 575626.

7 Worsley Park, Manchester

Par 71, 5,914 yards

This classy venue is attached to a fantastic Marriott Hotel, near the motorway, making it an ideal stay-and-play destination. The championship course was created by European Golf Design, and we were particularly impressed by the USGA-spec greens and the decisions you're forced to make off the tee. It's an undulating course with plenty of water, so it's not a matter of bashing driver on every hole.

Green fees: £70 (May 1-Sept 30).

2-FORE!-1: Mon-Thurs. **Tel:** 0161 975 2043.

2-FORE!-1
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A view from
behind the
16th of Wales
National

PORTUGAL

Blue is the colour

And golf is the game in this relatively undiscovered corner of Portugal's capital

WORDS KEVIN BROWN

The Algarve may be one of Europe's leading golfing destinations – readers of Today's Golfer certainly think so (they've again voted it the no.1 hotspot) – but the region is by no means the whole golfing story in Portugal. Far from it. Head further north to the capital Lisbon, and specifically the Costa Azul – the Blue Coast – and you'll be in golfing heaven.

It may lack the quantity of courses in the Algarve but the region definitely doesn't fall short in terms of quality and in fact boasts a number of courses justifiably ranked among Continental Europe's Top 100 Courses.

Generally speaking, Blue Coast courses are less crowded and, dare we say it, provide even

better value-for-money with packages and green fees costing a good slice less. This is due in no small part to the formation of Horizonte-Lisbon Golf, featuring seven splendid if somewhat unsung layouts close to the Portuguese capital and responsible for introducing a range of top-value golf passports: golfers can choose from a selection of three and five-round passports and enjoy these top tracks from €150 (three-round package) and from €240 (five rounds).

As a result, Lisbon Golf has quickly become a firm favourite with golfers seeking great value on stay-and-play breaks close to Portugal's capital and Horizonte has got off to a flying start to 2015, having already taken 50

per cent of its total sales for the whole of last year and record bookings in January.

That includes a significant number from the UK and Horizonte-Lisbon Golf spokesman José Maria Cazal Ribeiro confirms: "We're delighted with the rapid progress we have made in such a short space of time and the demand for bookings we've received from golfers in northern Europe has been fantastic.

"Our brand encompasses a fine selection of some of Portugal's most naturally testing golf courses which, coupled with a great climate and outstanding cultural offering, makes our region a must for any travelling golfer."

Besides the cluster of classy courses, another significant feather in the Blue Coast's





Elite venue
Troia is one of
Continental
Europe's Top
100 tracks.

Pine time
Aroeira has
two super
tracks.



Sits pretty
Quinta
do Peru is
mature.



Montado
Play-and-stay
resort is good
holiday fun.

cap is the close proximity to Lisbon, Europe's westernmost capital which attracts over five million visitors a year. Its culture, history and vibrancy is a captivating drive over the river Tagus across the longest bridge in Europe – Ponte Vasco Da Gama. Old mixes with new in perfect harmony; Lisbon is an amazing city to explore during the day while at night it has some of the finest nightlife in Europe.

Our first port of call was Montado Hotel & Golf Resort – a decent all round venue but, to be honest, nothing special. It provides holiday golf in the form of a gently rolling parkland track with lots of dog-legs, bunkering, large undulating greens... and water.

The most memorable holes come at the end of both nines: the 9th is a sweeping left dog-leg par 4 to a lakeside green in front of the hotel while the 18th is a thrilling par-3 finale to an island green.

While Montado may have lacked the wow factor, the next three courses certainly didn't. First was Quinta do Peru, a gently rolling parkland within a golf and country club – the course is overlooked by a charming rustic clubhouse – in every sense. Apparently, the restaurant food is so good that Chelsea's Portuguese manager Jose Mourinho, who hails from nearby Setubal (pronounced Stubal), pops in every now and then.

Designed by Rocky Roquemore and plotted amid the Arrabida mountains, Quinta do Peru is worthy of its place in the Continental European Top 100 listing. Twenty-years-old

'Troia lived up to its 37th position in the Top 100 Continental Europe courses ranking'

last year, most fairways are framed by a variety of mature trees.

All the short holes are pretty special starting at the 3rd, which sits beautifully in a valley and has a majestic mountain backdrop. There are a number of short par 4s on the back nine but they're fraught with danger and that includes the 15th, a narrow downhill to a green flanked by water tight on the left.

We didn't have sufficient time to play Aroeira II but we did tee it up on Aroeira I, which also has a country club feel. If you think of Woburn, you've got Aroeira I to a tee. It's gently undulating yet easy walking and every single fairway is overlooked by stands of impressive pines. It just happens to be closer to the sea, is based on sand – so is always in good playing condition – and there isn't a single fairway bunker to be wary of.

Aroeira I opened in 1973 and is challenging enough without sand, with the forest of timber and water hazards complemented by greens that can be firm and fast.

The Frank Pennink creation has pedigree –

it hosted the Portugal Open in 1996 and 1997 and probably the best holes are on the back nine – the 11th and 12th are classic par 4s while the penultimate hole is a short-but-sweet downhill with the green hiding on the left of the dog-leg.

The Donald Steel-designed Aroeira II opened in 2000 and although not so tight, it has five large lakes, a battery of pot bunkers and slick undulating greens.

Next to Troia, which fully lived up to its impressive 37th position in the latest Top 100 Continental Europe courses ranking. Plotted by legendary US architect Robert Trent Jones Snr on a slender peninsula opposite Setubal – where you reach it via a ferry – Troia is a top links. Several holes run along the coast and close to the beach with not a weak one among the 18. A selection of elevated tees add to the drama. Trent Jones regards the par-4 3rd as his personal favourite while we loved the sharp left dog-leg par-5 14th and the penultimate short hole, played from an elevated tee and providing breathtaking views.

Other Blue Coast courses worth checking out are Ribagolfe I and Ribagolfe II – in an ancient cork oak forest – and nearby Santo Estevao, another Donald Steel design which is gently rolling layout with well placed bunkers and two lakes. Ribagolfe has staged European Tour Qualifying School since 2009.

With David McLay Kidd's Comporta Dunes layout poised to open, the Azul Coast is shortly set to go up another significant notch.

All you need to know...

Where to stay, what to do off the course and some of the best deals on offer

GETTING THERE

At approximately 2.5 hours, Lisbon is a shorter flight than the Algarve (Faro) and being a capital city there's a good selection of direct flights from the UK from London, Manchester, Liverpool, Edinburgh and Bristol with TAP Portugal, BA, easyJet and Ryanair. Fares are from £22.99 (one way).

OFF-COURSE HIGHLIGHTS

Lisbon bristles with attractions and among the most popular are Sao Jorge castle, the iconic Belem Tower & Cultural centre, Jeronimos Monastery and Lisboa Oceanarium. There's lots to see and do outside the city as well.

Pick of the beaches are around Setubal and include the Costa de Capacrioca, Praia do Meco and Portinho da Arrabida.

The Jose Maria da Fonseca wine cellars in nearby Azeitao are well worth a trip if you fancy escaping the hustle and bustle of Lisbon for a while. Even if you are not a fan of desert wines, the Muscatel here is delicious and it's highly likely you'll be tempted to bring a bottle back home.

You should also make time to visit the majestic Pena National Palace, a UNESCO World Heritage Site which gloriously sits atop a hill overlooking the quaint town of Sintra.

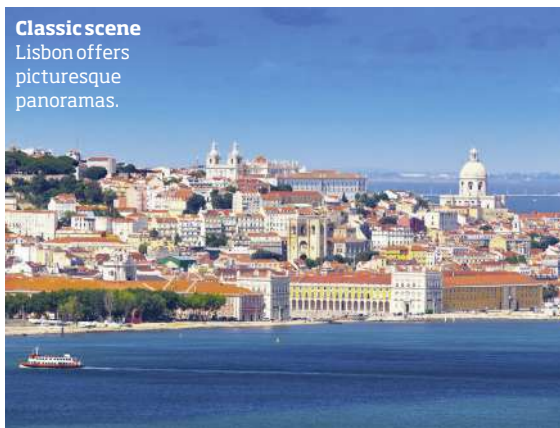
There's plenty for wildlife enthusiasts too, in the form of a flamingo colony at the Tagus Estuary Nature Reserve while further south the Sado Estuary Nature Reserve is the home of a school of dolphins.

WHERE TO STAY

Endless options to suit all tastes and pockets but TG stayed at the four-star Montado Hotel & Golf Resort about 15

Classic scene

Lisbon offers picturesque panoramas.



Selected star courses

● **Aroeira I & II**
Green fees: €90.
Contact: 00351 212 979110, aroeira.com

● **Quinta do Peru**
Green fees: €100.
Contact: 00351 212134320, e: info@orizontegolf.com

● **Troia**
Green fees: Mon-Fri €85; Sat-Sun €102.
Contact: 00351 265 494024, troiaresort.pt

● **Montado**
Green fees: €45-99.
Contact: 00351 265 708150, montadoresort.com

● **Ribagolfe I & II**
Green fees: €90.
Contact: 00351 263 930 040/961 718 725, ribagolfe.pt

● **Santo Estevao**
Green fees: €80.
Contact: 00351 63949 492, santoestevaogolfe.com

minutes from Setubal. It's a modern hotel with 90 rooms and excellent facilities including a Wellness Club with gym, pool, Jacuzzi and sauna. But the big plus is the on-site 18-hole course – you can stumble out of bed and be on the 1st tee within seconds.

The four-star boutique hotel Evidencia Belverde is another good base: it's golfer-friendly – it has a 'Shot' bar and 'The 19th' restaurant as well as an Attitude spa – and is just down the road from Aroeira while Quinta do Peru is just 20km away. ● [Visitizontegolf.com](http://visitizontegolf.com) for details.

WHEN TO GO

Like the Algarve, it's a year-round destination – Lisbon winters are mild and the summers hot – although the general temperatures are a tad cooler than down south. During spring and autumn, days are usually sunny with mild temperatures. Average temperatures are: Jan-Mar 17c; Apr-Jun 22c; Jul-Sept 26c; Oct-Dec 17c.

IT'S WELL WORTH KNOWING...

● Lisbon has an excellent public transport system including the Metro, nostalgic trams and even funicular railways to reach the steeper attractions. The Lisboa Card – available in 24, 48 and 72-hour denominations – offers free travel along with free entrance to 26 museums, monuments and other attractions (visitaskmelisboa.com).
● Make sure you've got euros handy if you use the pay-as-you-go motorways – credit cards are not always accepted.
● Lisbon is in the same time zone as the UK.

● Looking4Parking is an airport parking price comparison website that covers all major airports in the UK with prices starting from £30. TG readers can receive a 15 per cent discount by booking at www.looking4parking.com/uk?code=TodayGolf

USEFUL WEB ADDRESSES

visitlisboa.com; flytap.com; orizontegolf.com; montadoresort.com; evidenciabelverde.com

TRY IT FOR YOURSELF....

● **Deal 1:** Five nights' B&B at the Evidencia Belverde hotel, spa access, one welcome drink and two green fees (Aroeira & Quinta do Peru), costs €324 per person sharing a twin or a double room. To book e-mail belverde@evidenciahoteis.com or visit evidenciabelverde.com

● **Deal 2:** A three-night stay at Aroeira Apartments with unlimited golf at Aroeira I & II, Ribagolfe I & II, Santo Estêvão and Quinta do Peru costs from €211 (available April-June, based on four sharing a two-bed apartment). To book visit orizontegolf.com or email info@orizontelisbongolf.com

● **Deal 3:** A three-night B&B stay at Hotel Turim (Lisbon centre) with three green fees at any Horizonte course from €276 (April-June, based on two sharing a twin). Visit orizontegolf.com or email info@orizontelisbongolf.com

● **Deal 4:** Seven nights' B&B at Montado Resort and five rounds plus 15 per cent discount on spa treatments costs €437.50 per person. To book e-mail geral@montadoresort.com or visit montadoresort.com

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- Size: 100.05km²
- Visitors: Fivemillion





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The Links course is superb, but isn't a links as we know it.

OFF THE BEATEN TRACK

Reasons to be elated

It's shaped like a deflated football, but Sicily is all class

Two years ago, golf in Sicily was unheard of but thanks to a number of new high profile developments, the Mediterranean's largest island – shaped like a deflated football and sitting just off the toe of Italy – is rapidly establishing itself as a golf destination despite the fact there are fewer than a thousand golfers among the population of five million. Consequently, the seven full-sized courses are effectively for the exclusive use of overseas golfers.

A recent upsurge in the number of visiting Brits, particularly to the fabulous resort of Donnafugata, is explained by the opening of a second international airport at Comiso in 2013. The unashamedly upmarket resort of Donnafugata is just a 30-minute drive from the new airport and is every bit as appealing as the extra virgin oil squeezed out of the olive groves that surround it.

Although there are delightful swimming pools, a top-notch spa, sandy beaches nearby, a range of excellent restaurants and exceptionally comfortable accommodation, the two superb courses are the principal attractions.

The facts

● Getting there:

Flights to Comiso: Ryanair flies from Stansted while Alitalia flies from Heathrow and London City. Ryanair from £28.99 each way. Flights to Catania: BA from £79 each way; easyJet from £130.99 each way.

● Contact info:

www.donnafugatagolfresort.com; www.easyjet.com; www.ba.com; www.ryanair.com

● Do it yourself:

Five nights' bed & breakfast at Donnafugata including three rounds of golf costs from £385pp (from £495pp for seven nights' B&B and four rounds). To book visit www.yourgolftravel.com

The 'Parkland' and the 'Links' courses divide opinion as to which is the best but you can prepare for both at the Darren Clarke School of Excellence which opened last year.

'Parkland' fans point to this gently rolling track was given the nod over its neighbour when the Sicilian Open was played here in 2011. Designed by Gary Player, it weaves around olive and carob trees, around a couple of lakes and streams, but the principal threat is posed by the Bermuda grass rough.

Although you can see the Med from various spots, the nearest you get to water on the 'Links' are two big lakes. Wide horizons and strong breezes blowing in from the Med further augment a sense of seaside golf.

This classy venue is the perfect base to discover Sicily with the lovely towns of Ragusa and Modica, seafood restaurants, stunning Baroque architecture, honey-coloured churches and palazzos, tours around chocolate factories and wineries close by.

Elsewhere on Sicily, upmarket Verdura has 36 holes by Kyle Phillips, while nestled in the foothills of Mount Etna, is Il Picciolo Etna Golf Resort & Spa, the island's first course.



Top to bottom: The Parkland course at Donnafugata, designed by Gary Player; the Tour-standard Verdura East course by Kyle Phillips; there are plenty of off-the-course delights at Donnafugata.

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20 QUESTIONS

We ask Bubba Watson
what makes him tick
on and off the course



1 How old were you and where did you break par for 18 holes the first time?

I was 10 years old and it was at Tanglewood in Milton, Florida.

2 Best shot of your career?

At the 16th at Bay Hill (in 2011) I had a shot I could only hit 10 feet high because of trees. I had 204 yards and hit 6-iron over water to 20 feet for eagle.

3 One mulligan you'd like to have?

Second shot at 18 in the play-off at the 2010 PGA Championship (at Whistling Straits). I should have laid up.

4 Favourite course in the USA?

Pebble Beach.

5 Favourite course outside the USA?

The Old Course at St Andrews.

6 Favourite hole in the USA?

No.13 at Augusta National Golf Club.

7 Favourite hole outside the USA?

The 18th at the Old Course.

8 What's your key to distance?

Hit the ball in the centre of the clubface.

9 All-time favourite movie?

The Natural.

10 Favourite musician or group?

Justin Bieber.

11 Favourite sporting event, non-golf?

NBA Finals.

12 Favourite sports team?

Georgia Bulldogs.

13 Favourite male athlete?

LeBron James (basketball).

14 Favourite female athlete?

Kerri Walsh and Misty May Treanor (both beach volleyball).

15 Any golf superstitions?

I carry three tees in my left pocket.

16 Favourite view in golf?

A four-inch birdie putt.

17 Favourite TV show?

The A-Team.

18 Favourite holiday destination?

My house.

19 Who would be in your dream foursome (non-Tour players)?

Tim Tebow, Justin Bieber and my wife, Angie.

20 Who would be the Tour foursome?

Rickie Fowler, Ben Crane and Hunter Mahan.

**'Any superstitions?
I carry three tees
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